



SIBYLS LOGO - ROBYN GOLDEN-HANN 28 MAY 2018

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

SIBYLS NEWS

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Dear Sibyls

You will notice that this newsletter has been adorned with the Sibyls' new logo. It has been created by the very talented Sibyl, Robyn Golden-Hann and I know I speak for us all in thanking her for her tasteful and fitting design. Below the logo is the quotation from Galatians that will form the theme of the weekend at Hilfield Friary in September. However, as I write, we are about to meet for our weekend at Holy Rood House in Thirsk where we shall celebrate and discuss Tina and Chris Dowd's excellent book *Transfaith* which is a very helpful pastoral resource and shows how passages of scripture can be interpreted in ways that are very positive and helpful for trans Christians. Tina and Chris are now working on the third part of what will become, with *This is My Body*, a trilogy of Sibyls' books. We may be few in number but we do have a contribution to make in the continuing and heated debates within the churches and society at large. We enjoyed a memorable celebration of our 21st anniversary in March with our founder, Jay Walmsley – see page 8.

The government has still not launched its consultation on reform of the Gender Recognition Act though the letter available through the link on page 11 from the Equalities Office may give some indication of its thinking. It is surely right to say that advancing the rights of trans women (as usual the position of trans men is seldom

discussed) does not have to be at the expense of cisgendered women's rights despite the stridency of claims from militants in both camps.

Within the churches, while there are real signs of progress towards the full recognition and acceptance of trans people, in the Catholic Church especially there are few signs that the leaders of the church are really listening to us. The Catholic bishops of England and Wales issued a very disappointing statement on the issue of gender identity (see page 12). Reading *This is My Body* and *Transfaith* would be a good start in helping them to be better informed.

At least in this issue I am pleased to be able to announce some good news for the Sibyls: thanks to the unstinting efforts of our previous Chair, Jenny-Anne, the Sibyls have been awarded £5,700 from the Jim Cotter Trust. We have never greatly depended on money to do our work but these funds should enable us to be even more effective both in campaigning and in our core function of supporting and encouraging trans people to be faithful to their calling to follow Christ and live in their authentic identities.

I look forward hopefully to seeing many of you both at Thirsk and Dorset.

Pauline pauline.fleck@btinternet.com

M 07581553357

PS – a glance at the contents list will immediately show that a lot of this newsletter has been written by the editor. She doesn't mind too much but the only way to discourage such tendencies in future issues is to send her your own stuff.

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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 E-mail: 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

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 although the older newsletters have been archived and still protected.

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.

Forthcoming Sibyls' Events

- 21-23 September Weekend at Hilfield Priory, Dorset

Other Events

- 2-5 July summer school at Holy Rood House on Transition and Transformation, Identity and Integrity in church and society. Rachel Mann is a keynote speaker. Further information on Holy Rood House website.
- Autumn (tbc) One Body One Faith Conference on Gender.

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

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. (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. 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

12 April, 14 June, 9 August, 11 October, 13 December

All Meetings start at 18:00

Susan Gilchrist

Sibyls' Hilfield Friary Weekend 21-23 September

We Are All God's People



Paul, in Galatians 3:28 said “*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*”. There have been many advances in the recognition and acceptance of transgender people in society and in the Church, however there have also been backlashes, which include those groups who would wish to deny children the opportunity to explore their identities and other groups who may misinterpret our personal searches for identity as the pursuit of sexual misuse or for the power over women instead. As these public perceptions and misperceptions increase these issues become of increasing concern. This purpose of this Sibyls weekend is not to create plans or agendas but to reflect biblically and socially on Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28. As always the primary purpose of these weekends is to meet, build friendships, relax, hear from and support each other, so plenty of time for this is provided. We will be joined by the Revd. Colin Coward, former director of “Changing Attitude”. Also members of the Hilfield Franciscan Community will be invited to contribute. What does it mean when we say “We are all God’s people”? What does it mean to simply be able to be ourselves?

BOOKING FORM

I/ we wish to attend the Sibyls Hilfield weekend from Friday September 22th to Sunday 24 September 2017.

I enclose a cheque for £ _____ *

*IMPORTANT –please see lower half of page re. payment

Name (s):

Address:

Postcode: _____ Tel: _____

Email:

I/ we will be staying for the Whole Weekend / Friday / Saturday/ Sunday / (Delete as applicable)

Are you a member of the Sibyls: Yes/ No

Any special dietary or access requirements/: _____

Most rooms are single but it may be necessary to share a room.

Are you willing to share? Yes / No

If yes: Anyone or Name:

Please post this booking form to Pauline Fleck, 1 Newlathes Gardens, Horsforth,
Leeds LS18 4JU or email it to
pauline.fleck@btinternet.com

(THIS WEEKEND IS INTENDED FOR SIBYLS MEMBERS ONLY. PLEASE APPLY TO JOIN THE SIBYLS IF YOU WISH TO ATTEND.) If you wish to join the Sibyls, please email enquiries@sibyls.co.uk or write to: The Sibyls. 10, Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

Suggested payment and gift aid: the Friary does not levy a charge, but asks for donations. The suggested rate for donations is from £80 to £120 per person for the whole weekend (pro-rata if you only attend for part of the time).

Please note that at the moment you cannot gift aid to the Sibyls (we are working on that). However you can gift aid directly to the Community of St Francis, provided you complete and return the gift-aid form which follows.

If you can gift-aid, we therefore recommend that you split your contribution into two parts:-

1. A cheque/contribution of £30 made directly to the Sibyls (gift-aid cannot be claimed on this)
2. A cheque representing the remaining balance of your payment, made payable directly to the Community of St Francis. (gift-aid for the Community can be claimed on this. Any surplus remaining in the Sibyls' contribution, over and above that which is needed by the Sibyls, will be donated by the Sibyls to the community of St Francis. So, for example, if you decide to donate £110 pounds, a cheque/payment for £30 should be made payable to Mr P.A. Raftery – The Sibyls, and a cheque/payment for £80 should be made payable to the Community of St Francis.

If you cannot Gift-Aid, your total payment of £110 should be made payable to 'Mr P.A. Raftery – The Sibyls'.

For more information on the programme, and advice on travelling to Hilfield, please contact Susan Gilchrist at sibylslink@gmail.com.

Sibyls' 21st Anniversary at St Katherine's 18 March

This was a wonderful, well attended event. Malcolm Johnson presided at the Eucharist. There was a presentation to Jay Walmsley the founder of the Sibyls who responded with a gracious speech in which she used the peregrinations of her cat as a metaphor for the journey of the Sibyls. Tina's sermon and Susan's speech at www.tgdr.co.uk. Jay afterwards wrote:

A Big Thank You to the Sibyls

When I read in the newsletter that the committee was to hold a 21st Anniversary Dinner at St Katharine's, I was very pleased and was determined to be present. Then the committee in their kindness invited me as the guest of honour, which was quite unexpected, but there was no hesitation in saying yes.

I thought the day was excellent. It was a good choice to hold it at St Katharine's which was where the first arranged meeting was held in October 1996. It was an inspired touch to invite Malcolm Johnson to take the communion service as he took the first ever Sibyls communion service at that October meeting. Since then he has given enormous support to the Sibyls (it was his idea) and in getting the group off the ground; the Sibyls owe him much.

There was plenty of time to chat with friends old and new; the lounge in the modernised St Katharine's was just the right size for people to meet, sit and circulate. The communion service got us on our feet and the spirited rendering of Cwm Rhonnda at the end was exactly right. Group photos too were very reminiscent.

The dinner was a very pleasant occasion. I had been asked to say a few words but before I could say anything, Susan stepped forward and presented me with an inscribed glass bowl in appreciation of my work with the Sibyls. I had no idea that it was coming but was very touched and grateful; that bowl has a proud place in my living room.

More was to follow. Peter gave me a big bag of cards which individual Sibyls had been kind enough to send. There wasn't time at the dinner to open them and so I put them safely to one side.

After dinner there was more chat but no one stayed up until two in the morning. I took my cards with me to my bedroom. Due to a chest infection I had been carrying for a few weeks, I was exhausted and fit only for bed. In the morning I started reading them. The love and care shown reduced me to tears in no time flat and I couldn't continue. I eventually read them when I got home and again was moved to tears by the appreciation. The last envelope of all enclosed a cheque for all the donations over and above the cost of the bowl. I just wept, so kind. Thank you all very much.

Working with Sibyls was a pleasure. I have often thought that my role was to provide good places and ideas and opportunities for things to happen. The Sibyls brought their sincerity and love. With that mixture, things could and did happen. I will always

be grateful for my time with the Sibyls, which has given me so much, and I'll not forget your kindness and love. Thank you. God bless you all.

Transgender People and Women's Concerns

Susan Gilchrist

The recent United Kingdom Government proposals to allow transgender people to self-declare their gender identity has promoted a backlash, which I believe is driven by two concerns, one of these is the fear of predatory men, disguised as women entering women-only spaces for the purposes of sexual abuse. This is increased by the worry that some men may use the self-declaration reassignment processes and surgery to become utterly convincing as women for this purpose. The second concern is that of the feminist movement alleging that this is a way of exerting male power over women, and that the hard-won rights of women will be destroyed. Transgender people can rightly respond to these fears by saying that they are due to misunderstanding and misinformation. However a simple response of protest and hurt will not by themselves make them go away. Simply reciting mantras that "Transgender People are Women", however genuinely it is believed, reinforce these prejudices, and they encourage the reverse slogan "Transgender people are Men" to be used. (Nothing is heard about those transgender people who travel in the female to male direction). Transgender people also disrupt the "good order" of societies, where the requirement to adopt the behaviour and stereotypes which match the biological sex are enforced. The enforcement these stereotypes has been embraced by the Christian Church. Those transformations have brought the Church to collude with the secular demands of society rather than to challenge them. Not only has this collusion reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them. One only needs to look today at the behaviour of Daesh and Boko Haram to see how extreme this can become. 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.

For many transgender people the response has been to demonstrate their integrity in everyday lives and to attack the discrimination and scapegoating imposed by the Church. They are supported by the current worldwide consensus amongst the vast majority of the major professional medical institutions, which declare that these conditions are driven by the search for identity: they are not determined by behaviour or sex. Therefore the same full range of moral attitudes and inclinations will be found amongst the transgender community as in society at large. Also, because of their need to understand the gender divide, the likelihood of sexual abuse by a transgender person is less than it would be from anyone else. In addition the great majority of transgender people are not driven by the need to be men or women; they are driven by the need to be themselves. However the present focus has moved away from the legitimacy of transgender issues to fears about sexual abuse and the politics of power and sex.

It is true that a major concern in society is that over male sexual abuse (Although abuse by females also occurs). This has reached horrifying proportions, as the “Me too” campaign demonstrates. The transgender communities ignore these issues at their peril, as well as they ignore the arguments by the feminist lobby over issues of power and sex. Articles such as Debbie Hayton’s are excellent in their attempts to address these feminist issues (<http://quillette.com/2018/03/30/plea-trans-activists-can-protect-trans-rights-without-denyingbiology/>). One expects groups like Christian Concern to have the best interests of children at heart when they apply the traditional Christian doctrine to their approach to transgender children. However a problem still exists, because the usual presumptions are made on how gender identity develops are incorrect. That has been the focus of a substantial research study which shows how harmful medical misdiagnoses have been made because incorrect conclusions have been reached.

The results of this research show that every individual develops a sense of gender at a very early age, which is usually but not always associated with biological sex, and that this occurs before any other is created. Attempts to deny that identity lead to the horrors of reparative therapy because it leaves a vacuum inside. Many transgender people fight this contrary sense of gender identity with all their might until capitulation due to attrition occurs. This process also means that for everyone the development of their own gender identity proceeds in the same way. Transsexuals develop an allegiance to their gender which is contrary to their biological sex, but this is at least as firmly held as those for whom their gender identity and allegiance follow a normal path, indeed it may be argued that the gender allegiance which is felt by transsexuals should be even stronger because it has had to be fought for all along the way.

The results of this research entirely support the medical consensus, which regards both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as naturally expected variations of the human condition, which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life. This does not fit with either feminist approaches or the Christian tradition, which defines gender formation entirely in terms of learned experience and wants and desires.

In her article Debbie eloquently describes her own experiences and what led to her transition, however her description of gender identity as “merely a collection of feelings” disregards these deeper issues. Instead of grounding any argument on these broader issues, it moves the frame of reference for any discussion into the feminist camp. There will be transgender people who feel short changed by this approach, it does not address the concerns over transgender children, and it does not correct the medical misdiagnoses which lead to high rates of suicide, because wrong treatment and management methods are applied.

However, having made this qualification, I strongly recommend Debbie’s article since it very fully describes the reality of the situations that we face. As transgender people we transgress and challenge the social boundaries of society, and we will always be vulnerable to any secular scapegoating that occurs. If we do not face up

to and address the concerns of others with true care and compassion we shall never get the acceptance by society that we wish for and need. It is no longer just a case of saying society does not understand us. I totally agree with Debbie that our pasts should never be denied. Indeed the variety and richness of our experiences should be celebrated and enjoyed. However we must also learn to understand each other. That is where these issues of gender identity must be fully addressed. We are not predatory men, and as women we are just seeking to be ourselves. It would be a poor world if one group of people could not empathise and support another group of people whose histories are different from our own. Instead of just being rejected by any feminist movement or being made ineligible for all-women shortlists perhaps the question that should be asked is "How may we help humanity and the feminist cause."

There was a good, well balanced article in the Guardian on reform of the GRA, including reference to views of Debbie Hayton:

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/10/the-gender-recognition-act-is-controversial-can-a-path-to-common-ground-be-found?CMP=share_btn_fb

Also letter in Guardian co-signed by Debbie:

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/04/standing-up-for-transsexual-rights?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Facebook

Letter from Govt Equalities Office may give insight into thinking on reform of GRA:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/06/05/government-response-petition-anti-transgender-feminist-campaigners/>

No-platforming of Trans Woman

Intolerance of course exists on both sides of the trans controversy. A trans woman was due to give a talk entitled "War on Gender" at a venue in Leeds. Claire transitioned more than 30 years ago and is noted for her robust and trenchantly-expressed views on a range of issues. The talk was cancelled at the last minute apparently – and in Claire's view - because of representations made to the organisers that the talk would promote transphobia. Claire has made her views known about this on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahpVnHXzXEg>. I personally do not agree with Claire in most of what she says. I certainly do not agree with her view that to gain acceptance trans women should aim to be "gender normative" but I do defend her right to freedom of speech.

Feminine and Masculine Principles

Fr Richard Rohr, Centre for Action and Contemplation.

God is beyond gender, of course. Yet Genesis says that both male and female are included in “the image of God” (1:27). Throughout the Bible, both feminine and masculine images are used to illustrate the divine, although we must admit that the masculine ones dominate. It is important that all people are able to recognize themselves in the picture we paint of God. When we over-emphasize masculine traits, many women, transgender, and intersex persons feel less-than, that their voices and bodies don’t matter as much as men’s, that God’s image is not in them.

As we saw last week, gender roles are fluid and somewhat arbitrary. But we can learn from the archetypal patterns called “feminine” and “masculine.” Let’s explore the unique gifts of feminine and masculine soul principles (regardless of one’s gender identification), recognizing how these characteristics are evident in the divine. I do know that I am entering a mine field here, and many do not like calling things masculine or feminine. Trust me, this is only a starting point.

In most mythologies and archetypal psychology, the feminine principle has greater interest in the inner, the soul, the formless, intuition, connection, harmony, beauty, and relationality in general; it is more identified with lunar subtlety than the over-differentiating light of the masculine sun god or the literalism and linearity of the left brain. Not all women fully identify with the feminine principle, and some men do, but these descriptors give you a sense of where I am coming from—and moving beyond, too. Many of the Prophets, the Wisdom literature, and of course Jesus himself illustrate these feminine qualities. Jesus is by no definition a classic patriarch. The Divine is often called “Sophia” or Holy Wisdom in the Hebrew Scriptures; and God is variously described as a compassionate mother, a hen protecting her chicks, and even “The Breasted One” or *El Shaddai* (Genesis 17:1, Exodus 6:2).

The masculine principle, as I experience it and have observed it, is more interested in the outer, the mental, exterior form, idea, the movement or action of things, the naming and differentiation of things one from another; solar clarity of individual things, as it were, as opposed to the relationship of one thing to another. It prefers the ascent of mind to the descent of soul. It often moves toward “agency” and action before relationship or intimacy. Just watch little boys play, and watch how men love to fix, build, and also demolish. It is often a more “focused consciousness” than the “diffuse awareness” of the feminine principle, as Carl Jung noted. We see examples

of these characteristics in Moses, the Hebrew judges, the practical, eager disciples, and in many images of God as lion and king.

The dance of gender seems to be a foundational opposition in the human mind, which is why many languages (but not English) call even inanimate objects masculine or feminine. Our deep preoccupation with gender also helps explain why *dualistic gender taboos are often the very last and hardest to be resolved*, even among people who consider themselves quite open-minded, educated, and progressive. Gender seems to be a very deep archetype in the psyche. As long as we read reality in a non-contemplative, dualistic way, any gender identity that doesn't follow our binary "norm" will invariably be challenging and usually resisted. Binary divisions seem to give the psyche both simplicity and some kind of comfort.

Catholic Bishops' Statement on Gender

There was a predictably ill-informed and disappointing statement on gender from the Catholic bishops of England and Wales:

<https://cvcomment.org/2018/04/20/a-statement-on-gender-from-the-catholic-bishops-of-england-and-wales/>

The Tablet kindly published a letter from your editor in reply:

"Elena Curti writes that in just talking about the "difficult" subject of gender, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has taken a "bold step". As a Catholic trans woman I cannot fail to be disappointed by what seems to me not a bold but timid and ill-informed statement. I welcome the desire of the bishops to understand the issue better and that they are prepared to "accompany" me and of course I recognise that change in the Church happens at glacial speed. I wish however that the bishops had chosen a better starting point than the text in Genesis about God creating us "male and female". This takes no account of the many people born with intersex characteristics who cannot readily be assigned to either category. The bishops also ignore the lived experience of trans people who do not "choose" their gender but feel very strongly that God has indeed created them male or female but in a body that is utterly incongruous with their fundamental sense of themselves. This creates an acute sense of "gender dysphoria" which until it is relieved by transitioning very often results in mental illness and attempted suicide. How enriching it would be if instead of regarding the very small numbers of people suffering from gender dysphoria as threatening or subversive the Church were able

to welcome and celebrate their gifts as a part of the wonderful diversity of God's creation."

The Hardest Part (cont.) Or:

"I'm forever blowing bubbles".

Owing to complications in the life of my instructor, I have had only two lessons since my last report, one in person and one by Skype. The face-to-face lesson focused much on teaching me how to breathe (something I thought I had managed to do fairly successfully throughout my life, but apparently I am breathing clavicularly (bad) and not diaphragmatically (good). B tried to help me by inviting me to poke him at different points around his lower rib cage with a wooden spoon. I was impressed by the resistance encountered to my prodding. He also suggested I study the breathing technique of a pet dog, cat or baby who perform diaphragmatical breathing instinctively. Lying down evidently helps.

We progressed to the reading of extracts from poems – Frost, Hopkins and Rossetti's "Goblin Market". This was fun – I enjoyed trying to reproduce the cries of goblins selling exotic fruits. My efforts were recorded on a programme called "Audacity" and compared with readings by B which of course were far more resonant and produced a much more varied and interesting pattern on the Audacity read-out which produces a tracing of the voice like an ECG does for heart beats. B's trace looked like he was exercising vigorously, mine as though I had more or less flat-lined. I have downloaded Audacity on my own lap-top and have been studying the manual for a number of hours in the hope that eventually I will be able to record myself. I may even work out what a WAV file may be.

In the Skype session, we reverted to basics. I made "s" and "z" noises, hummed and blew lots of bubbles, gently and with careful breath control, through a straw into a glass of water. I then attempted to utter a phrase through the straw in the water which produced a gurgling noise like water running down the plug hole. But it seems the exercise relaxes the larynx and I was told that when I said the phrase without the straw the intonation was much better. The whole approach, involving pets, babies and straws seems aimed at doing things unconsciously without rational control, a bit like psychotherapy but more difficult. Technically, it is about semi-occluded vocal tract control which I could do when I was 3 months old but am hopeless at in my 60s. If I make progress with the straw and bubbles, I may advance to lip trills but that

does require an established breathing capacity in which at present I am wholly deficient. PF.

(Editorial note: this has been written to amuse rather than edify and is in no way intended to disparage the methods or competence of B for whom and for whose teaching I have the utmost respect.)

Book Review

Of Men and Angels – Michael Arditti

I took this quite fat book on holiday with me to the far north west of Scotland, partly as insurance against bad weather preventing me from doing the walking I wanted to do. The fact I finished the book tells you all about the weather I experienced.....

Of Men and Angels is really a number of separate stories, linked by the theme of how gay people have been persecuted down the ages in different times and cultures. It begins with an exiled Jewish scribe in Babylon, himself a gay man, trying to make sense of the varying accounts of the episode that eventually appeared in the Bible as the story of Lot and Sodom. It immediately raises the complex question of the means of transmission of the source material of the Bible and the compromises and human error that may lie behind the version that has come down to us. It also suggests that the version as we have it in Genesis is itself capable of various interpretations, not all of them to do with homosexuality at all. Nevertheless, the Biblical story has been hugely influential in justifying the persecution of gay people. The novel shows this being played out, quite horrifically, in mediaeval York, Florence during Savorola's puritan crusade (seen through the eyes of the painter Botticelli), in the Palestine of the nineteenth century where an evangelical vicar sets out to discover the archaeological remains of Sodom and in Los Angeles in the 1980s where a gay actor, who has lived a double life for many years, comes out following the death of his partner from Aids and his own infection with the disease. It is all rather grim but the last words are those of faith and hope.

The novel is strong meat but is far from being just a polemic. Arditti is a great storyteller who draws you powerfully into his narrative so that one is reluctant to leave his characters when the tale switches to a new era. The sections are linked by reflections from the angel Gabriel (as he points out, one of only three named angels in the Bible,

or only two if one excludes Raphael, mentioned only in the to Protestants apocryphal book of Tobit).

Trans Pride in Leeds

We had our first trans pride week here in Leeds just before Easter. There was a march, in freezing and wet weather, urged on by rather militant rhetoric from the leaders about “claiming the streets” for trans people. I observed that quite a large proportion of those taking part were very young and tending to non-binary in their gender expressions. There was a special performance of “A Fantastic Woman” at the charming and quaint Hyde Park Picture House followed by a panel discussion which included Jamie Fletcher. I enjoyed what I thought quite a powerful and effective piece of film-making but some of the panel thought it reinforced far too much stereotyped ideas about the victimisation and representation of trans people. Jamie’s theatre company performed their Dancing Bear show at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, also followed by a panel discussion which, at the performance I attended, was led by Christine Burns. This was strong, in-your-face stuff which boldly addressed the conflicts and rejections suffered by LGBT people at the hands of many churches. PF.

Miscellaneous

Krystina Jane Harrison: “How, whilst respecting the autonomy of different groups can we advance the lives, rights and services of trans people, of women and of all gender non-conforming people and lay the basis for future solidarity between these groups, not bitter enmity?”

<http://www.counterfire.org/articles/opinion/19538-as-a-trans-woman-this-is-the-unity-i-want-to-see>

Are we born trans? <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/15/transgender-people-are-born-that-way-a-new-study-has-found/>

Or does your mother wearing jeans make you trans?

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/04/wearing-jeans-makes-you-give-birth-to-transgender-kids-says-professor/>

And painkillers turned this man gay:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/16/gay-man-painkillers-turned-me/>

Lucy – a non-binary person (film)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/magazine-35726194/transition-my-first-haircut-as-me>

Sweet poem about non-binary people:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/24/elderly-aunt-goes-viral-with-wonderful-poem-about-gender-neutral-pronouns/>

Wonderful cri de coeur from Catholic trans woman:

<https://catholictrans.wordpress.com/2017/08/02/waiting-for-adoption/>

Transgender and Catholic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ck2chLYJV0&feature=youtu.be>

New Ways Ministry blog on attitudes to trans people in Catholic Church:

<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/04/03/baltimore-archdiocese-transgender-workshop-lesson-not/>

Catholic MP introduces same sex marriage Bill for N Ireland

https://www.christiantoday.com/amp/catholic-mp-introduces-same-sex-marriage-bill-for-northern-ireland-saying-he-is-living-the-gospel-message/127927.htm?_twitter_impression=true

.....the BBC interviewed people in N.I. about their views on same sex marriage. A farmer said that he was in favour: "Sure, why should they not have the same misery as the rest of us?"

Debbie Hayton: A plea to trans activists:

<http://quillette.com/2018/03/30/plea-trans-activists-can-protect-trans-rights-without-denying-biology/>

Letter in Guardian co-signed by Debbie:

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/04/standing-up-for-transsexual-rights?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Facebook

India Willoughby on Mumsnet and transphobia: OTT rant or fair comment?

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/24/india-willoughby-transphobia-opinion-worried-for-my-life-mumsnet/>

Liz Truss backs Mumsnet in trans furore:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/23/cabinet-minister-liz-truss-backs-mumsnet-in-transgender-row-as-users-call-for-new-section-28/>

Newspapers defend themselves against charges of transphobia:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/26/british-newspapers-anti-transgender-moral-panic/>

Eddie Izzard: transphobic vitriol:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/04/04/labour-fires-back-at-disgraceful-transphobic-responses-to-eddie-izzard-appointment/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/10/church-rejection-driven-lgbt-people-suicide-paul-bayes-bishop-liverpool-says>

“Same-sex attraction” nonsense:

<http://thefederalist.com/2018/04/05/probably-think-sex-attraction-fixed-researchers-dont/#.Ws3pdUFIWEk.twitter>

The archbishop of Canterbury and his cruel husband [warning: this is exceptionally ridiculous and distasteful]:

<http://dailypost.ng/2018/04/14/femi-fani-kayode-archbishop-canterbury-cruel-husband/>

At the recent summit of commonwealth leaders there was some controversy over LGBT rights as homosexuality is illegal in 37 out of 53 member states. The British government is usually blamed for laws introduced during the colonial era. Is this fair? Have these states not had sufficient time to change their laws, as we have done in this country? The government evidently feels some guilt or responsibility as it has donated money to commonwealth countries specifically to help them change their discriminatory laws.

Religious belief linked to increased risk of suicide for LGBT people:

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/religious.belief.linked.to.suicidal.thoughts.for.lgbt.people/128413.htm>

Stonewall launches trans allies programme:

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/media-statement/stonewall-launches-ground-breaking-programme-trans-equality>

Good interview with Ruth Hunt standing up well for trans people:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L1gP7YrEzI&feature=share>

Munroe Bergdorf gave I thought a feisty and impressive performance on C4's "What Makes a Woman" - "The reality is society is moving forward, people are getting browner, people are getting queerer, people are getting more fluid with their identity, feminism isn't inclusive at all."

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/17/munroe-bergdorf-what-makes-a-woman-genderquake-trans-gra-self-id/>

There was also a feisty performance by Paris Lees on Question Time (though I felt a little aggrieved that she appeared to blame "baby boomers" for all the troubles of the world):

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/03/23/you-have-to-see-question-time-panellist-paris-lees-taking-on-anti-trans-bigotry/>

Also from Paris Lees: Visibility is not Enough:

<http://www.vogue.co.uk/article/paris-lees-visibility-alone-isnt-enough>

Sad that transphobic leaflets were distributed at women's FA Cup Final:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/06/hurtful-and-disrespectful-anti-transgender-leaflets-distributed-at-womens-fa-cup-final/>

Trans Aussie rules footballer received 500 death threats for playing in women's team:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/17/trans-footballer-hannah-mouncey-death-threats/>

Harry Potter into Ginny Weasley:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/05/10/transgender-woman-gender-transfiguration-from-harry-potter-to-ginny-weasley/>

Podcast on transgender identity and faith with Jo Inkpin and Chris Dowd:

<https://omny.fm/shows/on-the-way/on-the-way-transgender-identity-faith>