



SIBYLS NEWS



Sibyl of Cumae. (1489-1491) By Filippino Lippi.

Issue no. 80 June 2017

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Grant that I may reach out as your hands across the World

(from the prayer of Mary Sumner, founder of the Mothers' Union)



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 maybe 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,

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.

There is also a member's section for which a Username and password is required.

The current username for the member's section is **SibylsWeb** (all one word). The password is **4All-Members** (All one word: use uppercase and lowercase as indicated)

Forthcoming Sibyls events:

15 June, 10 Aug, 12 Oct, 14 Dec 2017 - St. Anne's, Soho

Due to the General Election on the 8th June the date of the next Sibyls London Evening Meeting will be changed from the 8th June to the 15th June at St Anne's Soho at 6:00 p.m. Access and other details on next page.

22 - 24 October 2017 - Weekend at Hilfield Priory

18TH November 2017 - Sibyls Reflective Day at The Sisters Of St Andrew, Lewisham

SAD NEWS — PLEASE NOTE THAT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE HAS CLOSED, AND OUR BOOKING FOR 2018 HAS BEEN RETURNED.

RESEARCH TO ARRANGE A REPLACEMENT IS UNDER WAY. IDEAS ALWAYS WELCOME.

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

NEXT MEETING: **15th June 2017**

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

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

THE SERVICE IS 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. You can email me privately at sgen4144@gmail.com. (

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

St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, is 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, but it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you do know you are coming, please email me at sgen4144@gmail.com.

We normally decide on the restaurant at the end of the service. If you are late please ring 07546 213 971.

The remaining dates for 2017 are 10 August, 12 October, 14 December 2017

Remember it's 6:00 p.m. Susan

A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE C. OF E. GENERAL SYNOD MOTION (see page 8)

ON WELCOMING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

AT ST ANNE'S CHURCH, SOHO (see directions above)

FROM 14:00 ON THE 15th JUNE

IF THIS IS A CONCERN TO YOU, YOU ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND

Sibyls finances - We have received our first royalties from the Sibyls book of £237.90

A One-day Course to be run by Tina Beardsley and Chris Dowd

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH Saturday 8th July 2017 10.00-16.00

[http://www.sarum.ac.uk/event/transgender-people-and-the-church?](http://www.sarum.ac.uk/event/transgender-people-and-the-church?utm_source=Sarum+College+Main+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=98f38ea6cd-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_239ae9360d-98f38ea6cd-295091949)

[utm_source=Sarum+College+Main+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=98f38ea6cd-](http://www.sarum.ac.uk/event/transgender-people-and-the-church?utm_source=Sarum+College+Main+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=98f38ea6cd-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_239ae9360d-98f38ea6cd-295091949)

[EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_239ae9360d-98f38ea6cd-295091949](http://www.sarum.ac.uk/event/transgender-people-and-the-church?utm_source=Sarum+College+Main+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=98f38ea6cd-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_06_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_239ae9360d-98f38ea6cd-295091949)

Sarum College's Principal, Canon James Woodward, kindly invited us to offer a day course, based around both *This is My Body* and Chris's forthcoming book about transgender pastoral care. The available date was Saturday July 8th, which we later discovered clashed with London Pride. It is also the July General Synod in York at which, it has subsequently been announced, the Blackburn Motion (see page 8), about trans welcome and affirmation, is to be debated!

As several people have signed up for the Sarum course, we will carry on (and then dash north afterwards to arrive in York in time to hear the Blackburn Motion debated). If you are not otherwise engaged we would love to see you on the 8th in the beautiful setting of Salisbury Cathedral Close and the hospitable atmosphere of Sarum College.

In the pre-publicity, we mentioned the Sibyls' workshop 'Gender, sexuality, spirituality', and we will draw on that, as well as the material we are assembling for Chris's book, which is due to be submitted to DLT in September. Both the book and the workshop will include Bible studies. We used one of these for the first session of the Trans Pre-Conference at the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups Annual Conference, held in Gdansk at the end of May. It's based on Peterson Toscano's interpretation of Joseph (his supposedly colourful coat being in fact 'a princess dress') in Genesis 37-50, which derives from the interpretation of US biblical scholar, Theodore Jennings. This particular Bible study develops the trans implications of the Joseph story even further.

A day of this kind is mainly intended to take the message of trans inclusion in the Church to those who are keen to learn more, rather than for those who are 'up to speed', but we will be particularly happy if any Sibyls want to join us. Tina & Chris



**SIBYLS HILFIELD WEEKEND
FRIDAY 22nd to SUNDAY 24th SEPTEMBER 2017.**

A weekend has been booked once more at the Hilfield Franciscan Friary for the 22-24 September 2017.

The anticipated theme is "One Church, One Faith, One Lord".

The validity of Same-Sex, or Equal Marriage is a topic which is causing major dissention in the Christian Church. For transgender people there are potentially life changing issues and trauma to be overcome, for both partners, when one person in a marriage transitions. In the present climate the focus is almost entirely on lesbian, gay and bisexual concerns. The challenges which transgender people face are largely ignored. We will be addressing these issues from a transgender point of view during the weekend.

As a Christian minister Deirdre will be describing her personal journey of understanding of marriage, which has moved from the traditional point of view that it can only "be between one man and one woman for life" to the more open acceptance in the present day. Susan Gilchrist will give an account of the history of differing attitudes to marriage, extending from Old Testament times to today. Ways forward will be discussed. A further session "Transgender perspectives on Marriage" will be held to chart the way forward in particular from the transgender perspective, and ways of making transgender people more welcome in the Church, including the provision of appropriate liturgies, will be followed up. The Church of England Bishop of Salisbury will give an insight on the present disagreements that are currently taking place within the Church.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

This weekend is partly self-catering. You will be asked to bring something for the Bring- and-Share buffet on the Friday evening and pudding/cheese/biscuits etc. for the Saturday evening meal. Basics for breakfast will be provided but if you want a particular cereal bring your own! So that everyone does not bring the same thing, specific requests will be given to you at a later date.

Friday

- 17.15 Evening Prayer, (followed by prayer time) with Franciscans
 - 18.00: *Bring and Share Supper* and Introduction
 - 19.30: **Deirdre – a personal journey + Susan Gilchrist – historical background**
 - 21.00: (Night Prayer with Franciscans)
- Chores for Everyone, washing up etc. - if not already completed!**

Saturday

- 07.00 (Silent Prayer in Chapel with Franciscans)
 - 07.30 (Morning Prayer with Franciscans)
 - 08.15 *Breakfast: Self Catering*
 - 10:00 **Tina Beardsley and others: Transgender perspectives on marriage**
 - 11.00 *Coffee*
 - 11:15 **Plenary Discussion: Making a more welcoming Church**
 - 12.00 Midday Prayer and Eucharist with Franciscans
 - 13:00 *Lunch with Franciscans*
 - 14.00 **Free time**
 - 16.30 *Afternoon tea*
 - 17.15 Evening Prayer, (followed by prayer time) with Franciscans
 - 18.30 *Dinner: Self Catering*
 - 19:30 **Social time/Entertainment**
 - 20:45 (Night Prayer with Franciscans)
 - 22:00 **Chores for Everyone, washing up etc. - if not already completed!**
 - 22:30 Sibyls Compline
- Late Silence Together (very optional)**

Sunday

- 07.30 (Morning Prayer followed by silent prayer with Franciscans)
- 08.30 (Sung Eucharist with Franciscans)
- 08.30 *Breakfast*
- 09.30 **Sibyls Together**
- 10.45 *Coffee*
- 11:00 **Communion Service with the Bishop of Salisbury in the chapel**
- 12:00 **Group photo and Coffee**
- 12:15 **Informal discussion**
- 12:30 (Midday prayer with the Franciscans- for those who would like to go)
- 13:00 *Lunch with Franciscans*
- 14:00 **Meeting with Bishop of Salisbury: "Where now in the church?"**
- 16.00 Disperse

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, please contact pauline.fleck@btinternet.com T 0113 259 0878

GIFT-AID FORM FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT FRANCIS

I am a UK taxpayer and want The Community of Saint Francis Charity number (286615) to reclaim the tax on this donation, any donations I have made in the past 4 years and all future donations.

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.

I agree to the above statement.

Legal Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____ Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self- Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code. Please notify the Community of St Francis if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income or capital gains.

PLEASE RETURN THIS GIFT-AID FORM WITH

- YOUR GIFT-AID DONATION (CHEQUE MADE PAYABLE TO 'THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT FRANCIS'),
- THE BOOKING FORM FOR THE EVENT
- THE SEPARATE PAYMENT OF £30 TO THE SIBYLS, (CHEQUE MADE PAYABLE TO 'MR P.A. RAFTERY –THE SIBYLS')

TO

Pauline Fleck, 1 Newlathes Gardens, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4JU

Transport Advice to Hilfield.

It is always tempting to seek the convenience of the car, but the community is active in promoting low-carbon lifestyles, and does its best to help those who arrive by different means:

The community is happy to collect guests from local railway stations or Bus stops at mutually convenient times and asks for a £5 donation towards costs. In comparison the taxi fare from Sherborne is £20. There is also a car park at the Friary and guests are asked to car share if possible to lower their carbon footprint.

If coming by train, most travellers should type in Sherborne Station to discover train times. For some it may be cheaper to come to Yetminster station on the Bristol – Weymouth line. For a very few travellers, Dorchester South Station, although the furthest of our 3 stations, may be the best option. The friary can meet you by arrangement in advance at all 3 stations.

If you are willing and able to come closer to the friary by public transport, try Chetnole station on the Bristol Weymouth line. Google maps will give you the 4 mile walking route to us. Cyclists, there is usually room to put your bike on this train without reservation. A few people even cycle the 9 miles from Sherborne Station. There are usually unreserved bike places on off-peak trains from London.

The X11 bus runs approx. every 2 hours between Sherborne Station and Dorchester South Station. Type in Minterne Magna, a village 2 ½ miles SE of the friary as the nearest bus stop on this route. You can be met there if arranged in advance. The bus stops by the church. If you want to walk the last 2 miles over the hill, ask the driver if he can let you alight ½ m north of Minterne Magna at the Evershot sign – it is not an official stop.

There are few convenient coaches, but we do recommend Berries Buses which runs from Hammersmith in London to Yeovil Bus Station where you can be met by arrangement in advance. www.berryscoaches.co.uk

There are also taxis at Sherborne and Dorchester South Stations and Yeovil bus station. Beaver Cabs at Sherborne 01935816620.

The last half mile to the friary from the South is a steep, narrow hill. The Google Map does not tell you there is a sign saying that it is not suitable for large vehicles!.

Venue contact details

WRITE: The Friary, Hilfield Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7BE

EMAIL: hilfieldssf@franciscans.org.uk

CALL: Main Office: 01300 341345

Guest Booking: 01300 341741

International Transgender Day of Visibility from Debbie Hayton's blog



March 31st is the annual International Transgender Day of Visibility. In recent years, even a casual observer may feel that transgender people are already very visible, and query the need for it to be marked by a day in the calendar. Whilst campaigning groups have promoted the message that “Some People are Trans,” the press have published a seemingly endless stream of news reports and feature articles about trans issues. Editorial policy might not always be sympathetic, but the battle for visibility seems to have been won.

Sadly, however, society has yet to “Get over it.” Trans people may be viewed as brave or fearful, heroes or villains, or rescuers or victims, but they are routinely labelled as trans and – as such – dismissed as some distinct homogeneous group, different to everyone else. Rarely are they seen as people, ordinary people indeed, going about their business and facing the daily challenges that are familiar to most people across society. Society still needs to get over the fact that “some teachers just happen to be trans; some engineers just happen to be trans; some accountants just happen to be trans.” Those are just three examples from employment. The same sentiment could involve family, friends and neighbours. To re-phrase the campaigning slogan, how can we promote the message that “Trans People are People. Get Over It.” Ordinary life and normal routines, however, do not sell newspapers, so this message needs to be fostered by trans people themselves in their own communities where they are valued as individuals who contribute to society. For those that wish to be visible, Transgender Day of Visibility is a great opportunity to raise their profile and say, “I happen to be trans as well”, safe in the knowledge that they are far from alone.

The Trade Union Movement provides another context for trans people to be visible safe in the knowledge that they are not alone, and one that is not limited to a single day. Trade unions are active throughout the year as they have been for over 150 years. Equalities are at the heart of the movement and, and as I write, the TUC is surveying the experience of LGBT workers, with a specific focus on trans people.

TUC General Secretary, Frances O'Grady said “We hope that this comprehensive research will let us shine a light on the range of issues faced by LGBT workers across the UK”.

But trade unions are far more than service providers. They are democratic organisations that are owned and run by their members to provide mutual support in the workplace and in society. My message to other trans people on TDoV is to join a trade union. They exist to support their members, including members who just happen to be trans. The policies and priorities of trade unions are influenced by those who are active within them and take on responsibilities, so I would follow up that message with a plea for trans people to also attend branch meetings, then take up training opportunities so that they can support their colleagues. Mutual support works both ways. My day-to-day work as a Union Rep involves bread and butter issues such as pay and conditions, health and safety, and policies and procedures. My colleagues know me as trade unionist who just happens to be trans. It isn't an issue for them, but I know that I can count on their support on those occasions when trans issues need to be promoted in my workplace, across my union and across society.



Diane Torr, Male Impersonator & Performance Artist, 1948-2017 by Tina

I was very sad to learn of the death of the wonderful Diane Torr at the end of May. Taking part in her ground-breaking five-day 'Gender In Performance' workshop at Chisenhale Dance Space in July 1997 was pivotal for me. Most of each day was spent in intensive physical workouts (Aikido was Diane's favourite), sometimes outdoors - the weather was perfect. We discussed gender stereotypes, engaged in imaginative exercises and began to tap into archetypes. My body was humming by the Thursday, and powerful, positive energies were released, but we were in safe hands. Diane missed nothing. Warm, calm, loving, she coaxed us, coached us, listened to us, checked our make up or facial hair to the strains of Hildegard of Bingen's music. Later that year we all met up in Deptford to see her perform as her male alter ego, Danny. Here's how she introduces her work in a video you can access via the link below. It sums up her philosophy:

'My idea is to turn all the women into men and all the men into women. Not forever of course, but just so you could have the experience of being somebody else, somebody of another gender. I'm not talking about drag, or cross-dressing. What I'm doing is confronting the gender binary. I've thought a lot about gender'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paBsyBY_-dA



**CHURCH OF ENGLAND GENERAL SYNOD
MOTION ON WELCOMING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE**

July 9th at 2.30 pm

Please come to York if you can:

The following "Blackburn Motion" on Welcoming Transgender People will be debated at the General Synod of the Church of England in York on Sunday July 9th at 2.30 pm

MOTION: *...to move on behalf of the Blackburn Diocesan Synod: 'That this Synod, recognising the need for transgender people to be welcomed and affirmed in their parish church, call on the House of Bishops to consider whether some nationally commended liturgical materials might be prepared to mark a person's gender transition.'*

The Synod takes place from 7th to the 11th July 2017. If you can be in York at any time during the Synod meeting, particularly on the 9th July, please email the Sibyls as soon as possible on sibylslink@gmail.com

Susan Gilchrist

THE BLACKBURN MOTION AT GENERAL SYNOD JULY 2017

Scheduled for debate by General Synod in February this year, the Blackburn Motion was postponed indefinitely to make way for the debate of GS2055 Marriage and Same Sex Relationships. Synod, however, chose not to 'take note' of the Bishops' document, which had proposed no change to the Church of England's teaching on marriage – i.e. that it should remain only between a man and a woman – but proposed 'maximum freedom' of welcome to LGBT people, within that constraint. Not only were the majority of Synod members unhappy with this kind of split between policy and practice, voices from the parishes questioned the notion of 'welcoming' lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people as they were already members of congregations, as well as of their families, friends and work colleagues.

Afterwards the two Archbishops issued a statement in which they promised 'a radical new Christian inclusion', though without saying precisely what that might look like. We must hope that the sudden re-appearance of the Blackburn Motion on the July Synod is related to this new direction of travel. The Motion, which will be proposed by the Revd Chris Newlands, Vicar of Lancaster Priory, developed from a pastoral request. A young trans man in his congregation enquired about a rite or prayers to mark his transition, which led to this kind of need being explored and developed into a proposal by the PCC, then the local deanery synod, and finally the Blackburn Diocesan Synod, where it passed with a healthy majority. Unlike Private Members' Motions, which must attract a certain number of votes before they can be discussed at General Synod, Diocesan Motions have to be discussed, but there is no particular timescale. Chris will be meeting with members of Sibyls, and other trans members of the Church of England, as he prepares his briefing paper for Synod members and his speech for the debate.

There are people who are unhappy with the Motion. One conservative Evangelical academic, Martin Davie, has written this book which you can download: <http://www.latimertrust.org/index.php/component/jdownloads/finish/3/1911?Itemid=0>

In it he sets out his opposition to the proposal that the House of Bishops should develop prayers for trans people. Chapter 2 puts the case for gender transition, quoting my pastoral guidelines, Chris Dowd's chapter in *This is My Body*, and Justin Tanis's *TransGendered* which outlines a transgender theology. It's nice to be noticed! We are all quoted verbatim, in the interests of fairness, but Davie's critique seems to conflate what we and others say. His main objection, though, to developing rites or prayers for trans people is that, since Anglicans believe that liturgy forms belief, and he holds that the Church of England has not made up its mind about trans people, such prayers would amount to affirming what the Church has yet to agree on.

It's true that the Church of England has not had a formal debate on this subject, but the Church of England's House of Bishops have said that it is an acceptable Christian view to believe that trans people's experience is real (as well as being OK to believe that we are misguided!). The House also agreed to pray with trans people who had transitioned by default when it did not oppose the marriages of trans people with gender recognition in its churches (and merely negotiated an exemption for those who were doubtful). It responded similarly to transgender ordination candidates. Transition is not a bar to discernment as an ordination candidate in the Church of England, which has, and continues, to ordain people who have transitioned, affirming them as deacons and priests.

The theological opposition, therefore, is not well-founded, but this will not prevent people from trying to derail the Blackburn Motion with the usual sound bites and counter-arguments. They are painful to hear, but we must be ready to do all that we can to support this important initiative towards trans inclusion which has come, not from our leaders, but from the grass-roots.

Tina Beardsley

Gay Cures and Transgender Liturgies: The Interactions between Science and Theology in the Life of the Church - Susan Gilchrist 29 May 2017

Recent research work into the development of personality and self-identity in early life uses a novel approach to map the transition between the internally created and inbuilt neurophysiological processes which propel early development, to the externally moderated cognitive processes which come into effect in later life. The development of atypical gender and sexual identities is used to examine how this occurs. In this research it is demonstrated that these core features are irreversibly established before the brain has developed sufficiently to enable the cognitive processes to seek behavioural rewards. That means that these core features are driven by the search for identity alone. Therefore a moral duality must exist whereby transgender people and other gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities while conforming to the highest standards of their societies should be highly regarded. Those engaged in misuse may be severely condemned for their acts. That contradicts the traditional teaching of the Christian Church which condemns all such behaviour as disordered lifestyle choices that always pursue inappropriate sex. As a consequence Christian theology medically misdiagnoses these conditions. Great harm has been, and is still being, done because the wrong methods, including "Gay cures" are applied.

The same position is taken by the great majority of professional medical and psychological institutions in the Western world who currently regard both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as being naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development, and which cannot be changed by the individual concerned or by the actions of others in subsequent life. This is the position taken for example by the British Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and parallel United Kingdom organisations. Equivalent positions are taken by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. Other international mental health organizations, including the World Health Organization have followed. Against this is set minority conservative organisations such as the American College of Paediatricians and the might of sections of the Christian Church.

This contradiction is one of fact and not theology since both of these disciplines presume to dictate the motives that are involved, and the management methods that should be applied. Science argues that the behaviour which results is about being able to be true to one's own identity, while the traditional Christian theology presumes these behaviours are always actions of grave depravity which are invariably driven by the desire for inappropriate sex. An extended historical and social study shows how these restricted Christian interpretations have come about. There have been great advances in the pastoral care offered to gender and sexually variant people in recent years: but pastoral care, however compassionate and well-meant, is not enough. In February 2017 the Church of England's "Bishops' Reflection Group on Sexuality" presented its report on: *"Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations: A Report from the House of Bishops"*. The working party which created it identified two issues which they considered to be particularly important. First, there was little support inside the working party for changing the Church of England's teaching on marriage and sexual relationships. Nevertheless there was a strong sense that existing resources, guidance and tone needed to be reassessed. The Bishop's report advocated compassion but no changes in the teaching of the Church. In a letter which was sent after the rejection of the report by the Church of England General Synod, the Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York declared that, notwithstanding this rejection, discussions should still continue according to the traditional doctrine on gender and sexual variation as "The Church of England has received it". Despite the direct material and scientific evidence of the fundamental conflict between the disparate approaches presented by science and theology there is still the total refusal in these elements of the Christian Church to consider the possibility that there may be a flaw in the theology itself. That has enabled groups, such as the Latimer Trust to produce documents which include a great deal of information about care for transgender and other gender and sexually variant people which have been produced by these people themselves, while attempting to make selective use of outdated and specifically chosen scientific reports which are employed in ways that seek to prove that transgender people are prisoners of their own misconceptions and the correctness of the theology of the Church. That destroys the objectivity essential to any scientific approach, and it should be totally condemned when it is knowingly done.

However there is an important caveat. Many of the documents that are used fail to recognise the existence of the internally created and inbuilt neurophysiological processes which propel early development. The identity driven nature of early development is ignored. This means that these documents can be interpreted in ways which suit the theology of the Church. That enables the Church to continue to support its traditional doctrines which condemns them as behaviours which constitute a falling from grace, are disapproved of by Christian teaching, and they also are a lifestyle choice. That is totally contradicted in the lived experience of gender and sexually variant people: and this is responsible for the many misconceptions that occur. It is also shown that the current Christian teaching arises from changes in the theology of the Church.

The traditional doctrines presume that transgender people are men who desire to become women, and vice versa. In reality transgender people are people who want to live as themselves. Many fight against this contradictory sense of gender identity until attrition and exhaustion gives them no other choice. After transition many merge invisibly into society in the role they adopt, having attained a sense of self-identity which is coherent and complete. In the investigation earlier referred to it is demonstrated that the physiological, neurological and psychological aspects of brain development act together to form a finely tuned system in which the maximum amount of individuality, possessiveness, intelligence and inquisitiveness, together with the minimum degree of energy expenditure is generated. Typical or atypical gender identities can therefore develop

and, from a statistical point of view alone it is expected that a proportion of people who have gender or sexually variant identities must be created without the requirement for any external cause. It also means that for everyone the development of their own gender identity and allegiance, atypical or not, proceeds in the same way. Therefore transgender people develop a gender allegiance 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.

Two motions are to be debated at the General Synod in York in July 2017. Both depend on the validity of science. Should the Church of England refuse to denounce "Gay conversion therapy" it will be acting in defiance of the great majority of the current scientific opinion and it will continue to perpetrate the medical misdiagnoses which this creates. For transgender people, to be told by others that the conflicts many face is the result of the pursuit of a desire rather than a search for identity, is a denial of the trauma which is endured. To refuse such people the full affirmation of their own identity, is not only a rejection of the integrity of the people who are seeking such affirmation, it is also evidence of the failure of the Church of England to acknowledge the advances of science, and its continued refusal to offer a full place for everyone who seeks to follow the Gospel of Christ in the life of the Church.

Further reading:

Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Future Approaches to the Science and Theology of Gender and Sexual Variation in the Church of England and the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/232P-FutureApproaches.pdf>

Gilchrist, S. (2017): "No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>.

Gilchrist, S. (2017): "A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?" <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>

Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>

A full bibliography is also available on: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>

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Available with full references and footnotes at spap4144@gmail.com

Church of England Bishops 'too scared' to openly back LGBT inclusion, gay vicar says ^{5th} May 2017

A married gay vicar who is stepping down due to "institutional homophobia" has said that bishops are too scared to back LGBT inclusion.

Popular London vicar Fr Andrew Foreshew-Cain, a member of the Church of England General Synod, announced last week that he would be quitting his role.



The vicar caused controversy in 2014 when he defied Church of England rules by marrying his same-sex partner, in defiance of a ban on gay clergy weddings.

He has come under repeated fire from hard-line evangelicals, who 'named and shamed' him in a list of clergy they wanted removed.

Fr Foreshew-Cain announced he would be resigning from the Church this week as he plans to relocate to Manchester. Due to his marriage, Foreshew-Cain is allegedly on a "blacklist" which means he would be unable to get a license to officiate in a diocese outside London.

Speaking to Guardian, the clergyman accused church higher-ups of supporting LGBT-inclusivity in private, but kowtowing to homophobes in public. He said: "I have no sympathy for bishops who privately say: 'Actually, I really support you and I want to see a church in which we can celebrate gay and lesbian relationships, but I can't say that in public because I'll get attacked for it.' They hide behind a call to 'unity' [within the church], but they are collaborating with homophobia and hurt. And, sadly, that's true of most bishops." He suggested that many bishops remain in the closet for the same reason they suppress pro-LGBT views. "Bishops are too scared about what would be done to them – people on the conservative wing would attack them so vigorously. The conservatives have been given so much freedom and weight. The number of super-conservative puritans is relatively small but, for fear of them, they have been given a weight of influence and regard way beyond their numbers."

Last year the Bishop of Grantham became the first Church of England bishop to come out as being in a same-sex relationship. Bishop Nicholas Chamberlain came out in an interview with the Guardian after a rival newspaper threatened to out him, but claimed it was "no secret" he has been in a long-term celibate relationship for many years. However, the watershed moment did not ease the way for others. The Church was marred by controversy after gay priest Jeffrey John, currently the Dean of St Albans, was again blocked from becoming a bishop. The priest's repeatedly-blocked appointment is a bone of contention in the Church. His name has been put forward a number of times for vacancies, but opposed by the Church's evangelical anti-LGBT wing.

Foreshew-Cain's churches in Kilburn and West Hampstead have become a home to many LGBT Christians in London due to his inclusive-led approach. He took a very public approach to his LGBT activism, flying rainbow flags from the top of his church. Following the Orlando massacre last year, he put a moving memorial at the heart of the church.



THE EUROPEAN FORUM OF LGBT CHRISTIAN GROUPS' ANNUAL CONFERENCE, GDANSK, 24-28 MAY 2017

In this edition of the newsletter Elaine announces that the Sibyls are now full members of the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups.

I have only attended the Forum's annual Conference twice. The first occasion was in 2008, when it was held in the UK at St Albans. I led the Sibyls' Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality Workshop with Jasmine, at the invitation of the then female co-president, the late Brenda Harrison, who was very keen to promote trans inclusion both in the Forum, and in the Evangelical Fellowship of Lesbian and Gay Christians with which she was also involved. She hoped that the Evangelical Fellowship would change its name to include trans (it's not done so yet,

but maybe it will eventually) and invited Michelle and me to lead the Sibyls' workshop at an Evangelical Fellowship weekend at Holland House the following year. We do miss Brenda.

This year, the current female co-president of the Forum, our very own Elaine, invited me to join her in Gdansk to co-facilitate the trans pre-conference (3 sessions), and a main conference trans workshop. All went well, and with twelve participants, including some from Poland and Russia, this was the best attended trans pre-conference since they began to be held three years or so ago.

The evening of day two of the main conference proved very emotional. We made our way from our hotel to the European Solidarity Centre, built to honour the courageous bid for freedom that had started in Gdansk's Shipyard in the early 1980s, for a screening of 'I Keep Believing', a film about the extraordinary Ms Ewa Holuszko. A fearless Solidarity activist in the 1980s, Ewa was famous for her refusal to betray her colleagues during her two years imprisonment in those stirring times. A national hero, she lost her flat, friends and status when she transitioned in the late 1990s, and still lives in a very simple home. The State finally conferred honours on her in the early 2000s. When the film begins, she is recovering from cancer, which she said was relatively easy to deal with compared to what she went through because of her transition. Ewa can't bear to watch the film, as it reminds her of those difficult days, and she entered the theatre only when it was over, to be interviewed. Ewa is Orthodox and this is acknowledged in the film. She told us that without God she would never have survived. The standing ovation she received was well-deserved. I told her about the Sibyls, but she no longer sees herself as trans, and attended the women's pre-conference, though I'm sure that she would be willing to speak to us if ever the occasion arose.



Conference members also took part in Gdansk's Pride Parade which, like the Conference, had the full support of the city's mayor. The weather was superb, there were many people in the march, and plenty of loud music – singing and signing YMCA being a particular highlight. We were, though, protected from right wing protestors by a vast number of armed police with riot shields and a contingent of police vans. It was a sobering to witness public displays of hatred for our lives and loves.



I was very touched and honoured to be invited to be the principal celebrant at the con-celebrated closing Eucharist (a more formal liturgy than a Eucharist at the 2008 Conference where Brenda, a lay person had asked me to con-celebrate with her - for reasons of 'validity' I think for those unsure about lay presidency). Bishop Szymon Niemiec of the United Ecumenical Catholic Church (and formerly a pioneering gay activist) encouraged this, graciously forgoing his pontifical rights, as it was thought important, in a Catholic Country like Poland, where women priests are a rarity, for the principal celebrant to be a woman. So the lot fell to me, as Pastor Monika Bertram, a chaplain in the Lutheran Church, needed to attend to her baby son as well as the liturgy! It was beautiful to have him with us at the sedilia and the altar, reminding us to become as little children, even as we 'presided', and to share the pure spiritual milk of the gospel that we may grow up in our salvation (1 Peter 2:2). Completing our team, and with liturgical zest and good humour, was Fr Tomasz Puchalski. We were representative, not only of four Christian Churches, but of the four identities of LGBT.



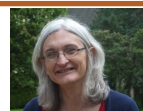
So a trans person has presided at the Forum's Conference Eucharist in 2008 and 2017 (and I feel very blessed that it was me!), which does rather signify the Forum's commitment to our full inclusion, whatever problems there may be when such diverse identities come together. Next year's Conference will be at a retreat complex just outside Rome. Will you be going? I can recommend this annual conference: you will meet some truly amazing people.

Tina

How to avoid Trans Stereotyping?

posted by **Morning Star** in **Features**

Saturday 15TH April 2017



Trans people need to commit to working with other marginalised groups – because when those groups speak with a single voice, their concerns can no longer be dismissed as minority interests, writes DEBBIE HAYTON

TRANS issues have become mainstream in recent years and they remain high on the news agenda, even in the midst of austerity, an NHS in crisis and an education system at breaking point. But while press coverage is generally very positive, some commentators — for example Sarah Ditum and Janice Turner — have raised concerns and questioned the impact of trans rights on women's rights.

Sadly, but perhaps predictably, the effect has been to further inflame a debate that was already polarised and toxic. Suspicion and mistrust have taken root, playing into the hands of those who oppress both women and trans people alike. There should not and need not be any conflict between trans rights and women's rights, so how did we get into this mess and, more importantly, how can we get out of it?

Life was very different when I was growing up in the 1980s. While drag artists such as Danny la Rue and Barry Humphries provided light entertainment on Saturday evening television, transvestites and transsexuals remained in the shadows. The former suffered widespread ridicule while the latter were generally regarded with pity. Legal protections were non-existent, so both groups kept a low profile, fearful of a press eager to expose and shame anyone who challenged gender norms. Today we may be far more knowledgeable but understanding is still weak, and ill-defined terminology exacerbates confusion and misconception.

The transsexuals and transvestites of 30 years ago have been joined by non-binary and gender non-conforming people under an all-encompassing transgender "umbrella." This is certainly inclusive, and it does generate an effective base for campaigns against prejudice and injustice, but — to those outside — it can create an image of a distinct homogeneous group, separate from the rest of society. Consequently, while trans issues may have become mainstream, trans people themselves remain marginalised. Whenever they become visible they are also labelled, and trans rights can be dismissed as minority group interests.

Being visible without being labelled is a conundrum with no easy solution. My compromise is to tag it onto the end, almost as an afterthought: I am a teacher and a trade unionist who just happens to be trans.

I teach physics, and what matters is my ability to engage my students in my subject, nurture their interest and curiosity, and foster their learning. The fact that I am trans is irrelevant to any of this, and it is not an issue to my school, my colleagues or the students I teach. Certainly I perceive no conflict between my rights and those of my female colleagues.

Meanwhile, my experience as an NASUWT workplace representative would be familiar to shop stewards across the country.

My time is filled with casework, advocacy and training; I scrutinise policies and procedures, advise members and respond to consultations. It is staple trade union work.

This weekend, at NASUWT national conference in Manchester, I will be joining fellow delegates from across the UK to debate issues that affect us all: workload, pay, pensions and the deleterious effects of government policy on teaching and learning in schools.

It would be disingenuous, though, to suggest that trans issues were irrelevant to my trade union activities. Equalities are at the heart of trade unions, and I actively support the campaigning of both the NASUWT and the wider trade union movement. It is vital work.

Only last year, a recruitment agency survey found that 60 per cent of trans workers experienced transphobic discrimination.

Some of this was outrageous. For example, one respondent was told that "people like you shouldn't be able to work with children."

Other examples were more subtle. Bias, some of it not even conscious, has a pernicious and chronic effect on the careers of trans people. Respondents seeking work reported being rejected for spurious reasons and when an interview panel claims that "on this occasion another candidate had more experience or better qualifications," how can a trans person prove otherwise? When they do secure work, trans employees find that they are kept away from public-facing roles, and promotion opportunities are limited.

This type of discrimination blights lives but it is very difficult to prove and, when it costs £1,200 to take a claim to an employment tribunal, the law is rarely tested in any case.

To secure the protections we need, we need to change society, but a distinct group campaigning on a single issue is unlikely to do that.

One current buzzword is intersectionality, but words are futile if they do not lead to action. Trans workers need to find common purpose with women and other groups who face discrimination, including those from ethnic minorities, people of faith and those with disabilities. We need to listen to each other and commit to working with each other. Because when those groups speak with a single voice, their concerns can no longer be dismissed as minority group interests.

Trans campaigning groups have an essential role in advocacy, lobbying and public education, but the trade union movement provides a unique vehicle for true intersectional campaigning on behalf of working people. Trade unionists can be proud of what has already been achieved, and they can be optimistic about the future. If we stand together then the voice of the labour movement will be heard across society and trans people like me will secure protections not because we are trans but because we are people.

Editor's note: I inadvertently omitted the flyer for the January event described below from the December Newsletter, for which many apologies. Then the report came a few days too late for the March edition. But better late than never:

The First Transgender LGB event at Crossway Christian Centre by **Stephenie Robinson** (Elder, Crossway URC church, Crossway Christian Centre)

The old Crossway URC church on the New Kent Road, London SE1 is now abandoned to its eventual demolition. After five years of discussion, planning, costing evaluations and rethinking we finally have a brand new purpose-built building on Hampton Street at the Elephant and Castle. It has state of the art audio visual equipment, new comfy seats and great meeting rooms - an all-round great venue although still compact and self-contained.

The church still hosts other users in the new building, as they did with the old building. It's a great venue and already more approaches are being made daily to access our new facilities! Many thanks to our minister Rev. Dr Peter Stevenson for all his hard work on this new church building project. It was unlikely to materialise without his focus and dedication.

Over my time at Crossway, I have longed and worked toward being a more inclusive church toward LGBT people, but been very cautious, as traditional values and strongly held biblical belief structures within the incumbent congregation required a degree of tact and diplomacy when introducing this concept. For any church wanting to reach the LGBT community for the first time, caution is advised, because from experience, if you get it wrong at the beginning, the wrong will be news that travels a lot faster than any good you may have done.

So, I was careful, and joined the Sibyls meetings at St Anne's church in Soho, (a really nice group of people!), where I explained my plan. Many members were up for attending an event at our brand new Crossway Christian Centre if I could arrange it.

I spoke to our minister and although most regular church members wanted to keep their distance they did not mind if I ran the event myself. Peter, our minister, came alongside and said he would be there to support the event.

Now, in January 2017 the new building was still being completed, so at the first opportunity I organised a simple 45-minute service followed by a meal at a local Polish restaurant called Mamuska just around the corner from our church, who also do vegetarian dishes - well cool I thought! So, everything was organised for Saturday 28th January 2017 starting at 18:30hrs until 19:15hrs or thereabouts, then all off to Mamuska's for a meal and a bit of a social.

The keys to the new building had been delayed and delayed, and by the time our event arrived, a text message came from Peter saying we could not access the building for the event! I gulped, horrified. All the advertisements and invitations had been sent, and two people were travelling from Northants I did not want to disappoint; however, Peter changed my table booking at the restaurant for an earlier time.

So, the grand plan was to wait outside the new building and as people arrived, gather and redirect them to Mamuska's whilst making apologies for the lack of access to the new building.

Saturday 28th came it was cold but not too uncomfortable. It was dark around 1830hrs when people began to arrive - I introduced them to Peter and allowed the conversation to begin. Five members from Sibyls attended and one of them was a C of E minister in her own right and yes Transgendered. You soon realise they are just people, some still hurting from the way church has treated them in the past. Others were seeking a resolution to their personal walk in life. We all walked as group to Mamuska's. I already knew the restaurant have a lot of gay people eat there so we were in good company.

The conversation was lively and Peter and I rotated ends of the table, the church very kindly paid for the meal for all of us as an apology for the non-access to the building. We did have a great time.

A few days later Peter enquired what the next move is. I explained, having visited Steve Chalk's Church Oasis at Lambeth, who are very integrated with all their community, that we need to tread carefully. We still do not have the keys to our new building, as finishing is well overdue, and deadlines for full completion keep moving. When we have the stability is when I will review the next stage.

Slightly aside from all this, on Saturday 11th March 2017 under invitation from a Transgender Christian Group on Facebook (Not Sibyls) I travelled to Nottingham to meet a church keen to replicate our efforts with the LGBT community,

Imagine my utter amazement when I realised it was a Vineyard church with over 3000 members. Their Sunday service attracts over 800 people, they have an amazing positive feel factor and a real mix from elderly, families and young people, I was stunned - church is changing slowly opening up to what Christ taught us that everyone has value. My prayer and hope is to have something of the same feel factor as that Nottingham church and that may mean we all need to change to ensure church is attractive with the right message and let the Holy Spirit do what He needs to do.

We are all amazing and we should not bar people from church based upon their backgrounds, if they are uncomfortable for us to connect with. This would leave us in judgement of them - it's very unwise to think this way.

Next move for us is to pray for God's direction and to see how we facilitate what God wants us to do. We are all empowered - it's time to wake up and see. May God grant us the sight to see things how He sees them!

A 13-year-old trans boy from Alabama has taken his life after a long battle with depression. 10.6.17

Jay Griffin, from Alabama, began his transition at age 11, but took his own life, possibly because of bullying, in late May 2017. I thought the following moving funeral address given by R.g. Wilson-Lyons was very fine.

“I have been a pastor for 11 years and I have done a lot of funerals, but this is the first funeral that I’ve ever done where the family wanted to celebrate Holy Communion. It’s not done very often, and yet, I can’t think of a more appropriate thing for us to do to honour Jay and to claim God’s grace upon him and upon us gathered here today. You see, other than the cross, the table is perhaps the most prevalent image of Jesus’ ministry. In his culture, breaking bread together was about much more than sharing a meal; it was about naming your family. That’s why Jews often wouldn’t eat with Gentiles, why Pharisees and other religious people wouldn’t eat with those they considered unclean. Because to break bread together would be to affirm that those people had a place at your table and therefore were your family. Then along comes Jesus. He was invited to the home of a Pharisee for dinner, and the scriptures tell us a “sinful woman” showed up. Jesus would go to the homes and eat at the table of tax collectors, causing a collective grumble among the religious. In short, Jesus ate with everybody and the message was clear— for Jesus, there is a place at the table for everyone, Pharisee or tax collector, religious or those deemed sinful, pillar of the community or those who had been cast out – Jesus ate with everyone.

Jesus went on to solidify the table as his central work during his last supper where he took bread and wine and gave it to his disciples saying, “This is how you are to remember me.” Let’s pause for a minute and think of who was at that table during Jesus last supper. There were men who would soon deny him. There was Judas who would betray him. There was Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector – Matthew the one who collected taxes for Rome and Simon who wanted to violently overthrow Rome. In another life, Simon wanted to kill people like Matthew, and yet there they were, both at Jesus’ table, both a part of Jesus’ family. My guess is they still didn’t understand each other very well. And yet, that didn’t matter. All that mattered is that they both knew that there was a place for both a zealot and a tax collector at Jesus’ table. There was a place for both of them in Jesus’ family.

Friends, I know that some of you are having a hard time understanding how Jane became Jay and processing that journey he went through. I imagine that struggle to understand is even harder because of the tragedy of how his life ended. But what I want to say to you is that you don’t have to understand. Just as Mathew and Simon probably still did not understand each other very well, what they did understand is that there is place at Jesus’ table, a place in Jesus’ kingdom for both of them. Friends, you don’t have to understand everything that has happened in Jay’s life, but what I want to say to you is that there is beyond a shadow of doubt a place at Jesus’ table for Jay and there is a place at Jesus’ table for you. At this table, all are loved, all are welcomed, all are accepted as they are.

And I can’t think of a more important message that we as followers of Jesus have to share with the world than that. Friends, we live in a world where gay and lesbian youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth. And 40% of transgendered persons attempt suicide at some point in their life – that’s compared to 4% of the non-transgendered population. Beyond issues of gender identity and sexuality, we live in a culture where our young people are constantly told they are not smart enough, not athletic enough, not pretty enough, not enough. Far, far too often, when people believe that they are not accepted, that there is not a place at the table for them, it so often leads to tragedy and death. And yet, we have a gospel that says there is room at God’s table for everyone. That God’s grace extends to ALL. We have the words of life as followers of Jesus – not just life for some, not just life for those that everybody understands, but the words of life for everybody.

In the United Methodist church, we baptize babies. We do so because we believe that God’s grace is upon that child’s life even before he or she knows how to say God. We do so because we believe that the first word about all of us is that we are enough – we are enough simply because we are God’s. Friends, the gospel challenges every voice that says to any of us that we are not enough. It challenges any voice that says to anyone that you are an abomination. It challenges any voice that says to anyone you are unnatural. And it invites us to follow after the example of Jesus so that here in church we say, “I know they may call you a dirty tax collector, but here you are a child of God. There’s a place for you at this table. I know they call you a “sinful woman” but we say you are a child of God and there is a place for you at this table. I know they may call you unnatural or confused, but we say that you are a child of God and there is a place for you at this table.

It was Mother Theresa who said, “There is more hunger for love than there is for bread,” a radical statement considering she worked daily with people who were physically starving for bread. I know Erin and Matt are so deeply appreciative of so many of you who loved and supported Jay, but today is a reminder of just how important that task of loving and accepting really is. Friends, we go through life often not knowing the struggles and the pain that those we see every day are carrying, so let us make a promise to one another and before God that we will go through life with great gentleness and kindness. We will refrain from judgment and be abundant with love. We will make a room at our tables and in our hearts for all, whether we understand what someone may be going through or not, for we know that God has already reserved a spot at God’s great table for each of us.

Now I said the table is the most prevalent image of Jesus’ life other than the cross, and just as I think it was so appropriate for Erin to bring us to the Communion table as we remember Jay, it is also essential that we reflect on the cross. The 4th century church father, Gregory of Naziansus said, “That which Christ has not assumed, he has not redeemed.” Because God has entered into every facet of humanity, God has redeemed every facet of humanity, including the very worst of human tragedy. Because Jesus suffered in the most tragic way imaginable, Jesus has redeemed the very worst of human despair and anguish. Friends, this is so hard. We have lost someone way too soon and there is nothing I or anyone can say to make you not hurt right now. We are in pain. This is hard. But, in the midst of even this, Jesus has overcome precisely because Jesus also suffered tragedy. As tragic as Jay’s death is and as painful as it is to all who loved him, even this redeemed because Jesus has assumed the pain of tragic death just as Jay has. There is hope even in this.

Funeral address (continued)

So I leave you with one image and one challenge – I have a 4 year old daughter who overheard me talking on the phone about this funeral. She doesn't understand everything that happened, but she understands that Jay died and she said, "So, Daddy, he's in heaven with Jesus." I said, "Yes honey, he is." I imagine Jesus welcoming Jay, embracing him, saying to him, "Jay, my precious precious boy. You are safe with me. You are loved by me. And You are welcomed here in my kingdom. Come and have a seat at my table."

And then I imagine Jesus turning to us and saying, "Now, you have work to do. Go into all the world and tell all those who are hurting, tell all those who have been rejected, tell all those who are bullied and made to feel like their life doesn't matter, tell them all that there is a place at my table for them – a place where they are loved, a place where they are accepted, a place where they are safe. And don't just tell them. But create that space for them. Create my kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven. Create loving, supportive community no matter what."

Friends, that is the call of Christ upon us. And I can't think of a greater way to honour the memory of Jay than to live into that call fully. With God's help, may we do so. Amen."

I REGRET TRANSITIONING from 'The Guardian' 3.2.17

When I was a little girl living in the Midlands, I used to say, "When I grow up, I want to be a boy." I even used to wee standing up. I loved playing football, but when I was about seven my friends said I had to stop because I was a girl. I told them I didn't see what difference that made, and one of them pulled his shorts down and showed me. A sickening feeling washed over me: something about me, and my body, was wrong.

These feelings became more powerful as I grew older. When I saw my chest changing I was horrified; I developed an eating disorder to try to delay puberty, cut my hair short and started binding my chest. I was depressed and tried to kill myself. At 14, I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for a couple of months.

My parents were stunned, and tried to convince me to start embracing life as a woman. They arranged for someone to teach me how to apply makeup, hoping that if I learned to look more like other girls, I would feel more like them.

It wasn't until I was 15 that I found out about transitioning. Everything fell into place: this was who I was. I realised I could have the body I wanted. When I went to my GP, aged 17, I was told I was too old to refer to children's services and too young to be seen as an adult; I didn't get my first appointment until three months after my 18th birthday.

After months of waiting and appointments, none of which included counselling, I finally started on testosterone gel, later switching to injections. It was a huge thing when, at university, my voice broke, and my figure started changing: my hips narrowed, my shoulders broadened. It felt right. Passing as a man, I felt safer in public places, I was taken more seriously when I spoke, and I felt more confident.

Then I had chest surgery. It was botched and I was left with terrible scarring; I was traumatised. For the first time, I asked myself, "What am I doing?" I delayed the next steps of hysterectomy and lower surgery, after looking into phalloplasty and realising that I was going to need an operation every 10 years to replace the erectile device. Trans issues were starting to be written about in the media, and I understood that people would always be able to recognise me as having transitioned. I just wanted to be male, but I was always going to be trans.

At the same time, there was a significant change in how I felt about my gender. Reflecting on the difference in how I was treated when people saw me as a man, I realised other women were also held back by this. I had assumed the problem was in my body. Now I saw that it wasn't being female that was stopping me from being myself; it was society's perpetual oppression of women. Once I realised this, I gradually came to the conclusion that I had to detransition.

I have come off testosterone and, as my body has resumed production of its own hormones, I have become someone female who looks like a man. I will always have a broken voice and will never regrow breasts, but my hips and thighs are getting bigger. Being male was more comfortable for me, but remaining on hormones means I would have continued to focus on my body as the problem – when I don't believe it belongs there. What feels easiest isn't always what's right.

I made the best possible decision in poisoned circumstances, and if I hadn't had treatment when I did, I might not be alive. But I do feel very sad when I think of my fertility: I want to be a parent one day, but it's likely that being on testosterone has made that more difficult. I'm now in my late 20s and won't know until I try to have children.

I feel happy for those people transition has helped, but I think there should be more emphasis on counselling, and that it should be seen as the last resort. Had that been the case for me, I might not have transitioned. I was so focused on trying to change my gender, I never stopped to think about what gender meant. Ultimately, I feel hopeful for the future. I've seen that I have an immense capacity to change and grow, even in very difficult circumstances. That is who I am.

- As told to Moya Sarner.

'No, Alice, I don't want to become a man, I just want to stop trying to be a woman.'

Following a sell-out run at Theatre 503 in 2015, Jon Brittain's 'Rotterdam' returns to London this summer.

At Theatre 503, London, until 21 November. Box office: 020-7978 7040.

[Please note—the editor has no shares in the theatre nor the company!]

A bittersweet comedy about gender, sexuality and being a long way from home

Some reviews:-

"Jon Brittain's warm-hearted new play manages to speak eloquently about a complex issue while at the same time being properly laugh-out-loud funny. It's an arresting combination and likely to prove another winner . . . this is a very human play, one that never feels overtly issue-driven or forced. . . . Sweet, heartfelt and funny new play about gender, identity and love" – *Stage*

"a timely and heartwarming comedy. . . . The play is a fascinating - and very funny - examination of the labels society puts on people . . . But more importantly, it's about the labels we put on ourselves. . . . Brittain's script successfully combines laugh-out-loud humour and heartfelt emotion to tackle a serious, complex and extremely current subject. . . . funny, warm and honest" – *London Theatre 1*

"smartly observed and very funny play . . . The reference to Europe's largest cargo port is a drama keenly concerned with transitions and upheaval - the displacement of individuals' baggage, and of society's. . . . a warm and emotionally intelligent piece, which proves questions about sexuality and the ways in which we articulate identity and desire." – *Evening Standard*

"Rotterdam takes the format of a rom-com to raise thorny issues of gender, sexuality and identity with a light touch that is sensitive rather than superficial . . . Brittain's play is a smart and sassy contemporary take on the fluidity of sexuality with loads of laugh-out-loud moments that don't belittle its essentially serious themes. Beautifully constructed with surprising but credible plot twists, Rotterdam is a warmly engaging account of the complexities of relationships that balances humour with pathos so that you care for the characters." – *Londonist*
"very funny, engaging and sharply observant about human nature" – *Guardian*

"It humanises and empathises - and forces its audience to do the same. [...] While the play sensitively probes the difficulties of being gay and of being transgender, Brittain never lets the seriousness drown out the humour. . . . Brittain's play is another reminder - warm, witty and wise - of the stupidity of thinking that there are only two genders. He has an eye for tenderness . . . and an ear for the undulations of couples' conversations." – *Time Out London*

Trans-people tend to have heard in a vague way about Tehran being the GRS capital of the world. I thought this needed checking out.

Transsexual people in Iran - the facts

In 1963, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wrote a book in which he stated that there was no religious restriction on corrective surgery for intersex individuals, though this did not apply to those without physical ambiguity in sex organs. At the time Khomeini was a radical, anti-Shah revolutionary and his fatwas did not carry any weight with the Imperial government, which did not have any specific policies regarding transsexual individuals.

The new religious government that came to be established after the 1979 Iranian Revolution classed transsexuals and crossdressers with gays and lesbians, who were condemned in the Shah's era and faced the punishment of lashing or even death under Iran's penal code.

One early campaigner for transsexual rights was **Maryam Hatoon Molkara**, who had been assigned male at birth but identified as female. Before the revolution, she had longed to become physically female but could not afford surgery and wanted religious authorization. In 1975, she began to write letters to Khomeini, who was to become the leader of the revolution and was in exile. After the revolution, she was fired, forcedly injected with male hormones, and institutionalized. She was later released with help from her connections and continued to lobby many other leaders.

Later she went to see Khomeini, who had returned to Iran. Turning up at the Ayatollah's compound in a man's suit, with breasts tightly strapped down and carrying a copy of the Qu'ran, 'Fereydoon' (her original male name) approached the building. Unsurprisingly, she was jumped on viciously by the guards and it was only the intervention of Khomeini's brother that stopped the beating. As Fereydoon hurriedly tried to explain her situation the guards noticed she had something strapped to her chest. Fearing that it was explosives they insisted she removed the bandages.

It was the defining moment: as 'Fereydoon's' breasts were exposed the women in the house rushed to cover them with a chador. Such was the confusion generated by the incident the various minions had no choice but to seek the input of the Ayatollah. Incredibly, given the savagery meted out to homosexuals, Khomeini angrily berated those who had assaulted Fereydoon.

He then gave her a letter addressed to the chief prosecutor and the head of medical ethics giving religious authorisation for her to have the surgery, which she later did in 1997. Due to this fatwa, issued in 1987, transsexual women in Iran have been able to live as women until they can afford surgery, have surgical reassignment, have their birth certificates and all official documents issued to them in their new gender, and get married to men.

Khomeini's original fatwa has since been reconfirmed by the current leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, and is also supported by many other Iranian clerics. However, there is still a great deal of stigma attached to the idea of transsexualism and gender reassignment in ordinary Iranian society, and most transsexuals, after completing their transition, are advised to maintain discretion about their past. Once a transsexual individual has undergone sex reassignment, that person legally becomes the new sex. All legal documents, such as birth certificates and passports, are also changed accordingly.

Currently, it is not possible for presumed transsexual individuals to choose not to undergo surgery - if they are approved for sex reassignment; they are expected to undergo treatment immediately. Those who wish to remain "non-operative" (as well as those who cross-dress and/or identify as genderqueer) are considered their biological gender, and as such they are likely to face harassment as being homosexuals and subject to the same laws barring homosexual acts.



A Daily Mail columnist has claimed that the “powerful transgender lobby” is threatening the sanity of so-called “normal children”. 14th December 2016

Sarah Vine claims that a new book on gender identity for kids, *Can I Tell You about Diversity*, is threatening cisgendered children. [The journalist asks readers](#): “have they simply caved in to the powerful and very vocal transgender lobby for fear of being branded as ‘backward’ or, worse, as bigots?”



The wife of former Secretary of State for Education claims that young people are no more questioning their gender in 2016 than in 1916, but that stars like Caitlyn Jenner and Eddie Redmayne are forcing children into changing themselves. “Ideas that, until recently, were considered at best fanciful, at worst extreme, seem to have infiltrated traditionally sober institutions, including the medical establishment (hormone therapy is now available on the NHS even to pre-pubescent children) and, perhaps more worryingly, education”, she writes. She even cites one story – verified by nobody but herself – that a school child was given detention for saying they were not trans.

“I recently heard about a secondary school pupil who, during a PSHE (personal, social and health education) classroom discussion about gender, said that, on balance, she thought she was probably just ‘normal’”, Ms Vine writes. “Cue sharp intake of breath. The correct terminology, the teacher informed her curtly, is ‘cis’. She was even punished with a detention.”

The columnist calls for ending the “nonsense” of LGBT-inclusive education. “In attempting to improve the lives of a vanishingly small minority, we are threatening the sanity of — and, yes, I’m going to say it — normal children. It’s time to put an end to this nonsense. Yes, there must be compassion for the very few who experience gender confusion. But there must also be common sense that this is not something that affects the majority of children. But then common sense, that once great British characteristic, seems to be a dying quality these days.”



A father and daughter have transitioned together from mother and son. 21.3. 2017

The couple shared their journey over two years, going through the process together. Eric Maison, 39, started his transition to male in Autumn 2015. His daughter Corey, 15, also started her transition with hormone treatment in 2015.



Parents of transgender children in the UK are reporting that the NHS is turning them away if they have sought out private doctors. 26.2.17

A number of people are reporting long waiting lists and delays in the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, which runs the gender service for under 18s. The waiting time is being put down to assessments which take up a large period of time, causing a backlog.

The trust said that the wellbeing of patients is their concern, but if hormone treatments are prescribed outside of the service then they cannot continue to provide ongoing supervision.

Referrals to the trust have reached a record high, with 1,500 cases being taken on in this financial year. 1,200 families are currently on the waiting list, and they face a six month wait before getting the first appointment.

School bans pupils from talking to girl because her parent is trans 16th February 2017

The unnamed child from Manchester, UK, has been shunned by her classmates after teachers issued the order. They told students at the orthodox Jewish school not to communicate with the girl “in any way”, the Jewish Telegraph reports. The child is understood to be younger than 12-years-old.

Students at the school wrote the girl a letter telling her that if they see her they must ignore her, but “that they would always love her and that they would pray for her,” according to the report. It comes after her trans parent lost a court battle to be allowed to see her children after leaving an ultra-Orthodox Jewish community and transitioning.

The woman had said she wanted to be “sensitively re-introduced” to her children. She had not seen the children since before she left the Charedi Jewish community 18 months prior. But her estranged wife said seeing her post transition could lead them to be alienated from within the community.

Family court judge Mr Justice Peter Jackson has said he reached the decision “with real regret”. Handing down his decision, the judge said: “I can see no way in which the children could escape the adult reaction to them enjoying anything like an ordinary relationship with their father. In the final analysis, the gulf between these parents – the mother within the ultra-Orthodox community and the father as a transgender person – is too wide for the children to bridge. This outcome is not a failure to uphold transgender rights, still less a ‘win’ for the community, but the upholding of the rights of the children to have the least harmful outcome in a situation not of their making.”

Stonewall is calling for the recognition of non-binary people on British passports. 5th April 2017

According to the proposal, released today as part of the LGBT charity's "five-year plan" for trans inclusion, the government would include a new "X" gender category on passports. The charity is also calling for the spousal veto to be eliminated and changing the Equality Act to protect people's "gender identity," eliminating the outdated terms "gender reassignment" and "transsexual". Trans people should also not have to provide medical evidence to legally change their gender, the charity has said.

The "X" category would also be on official government forms in the charity's plan, which it said would help trans and non-binary people to avoid difficulties they have always suffered. "Not having legal recognition means non-binary people must constantly live as someone they are not," the charity stated, adding that they are "not recognised or protected under law".

Bex Stinson, head of trans inclusion at Stonewall, said: "Limiting passport gender markers to 'male' and 'female' often presents hurdles for trans people, and can lead to them choosing not to travel at all. If the way a person expresses their gender identity does not 'match' the gender in their passport, this can lead to distressing questions. This situation would be avoided if 'X' markers were available for UK passport holders."

"The International Civil Aviation Organisation allows passports to be issued with an 'X' gender marker, but the UK does not issue these." Australia, New Zealand and Nepal already allow third-gender or gender X passports, while Canada allows foreign visitors to identify themselves as "other" on official forms.

Students at Hull University have been told to use gender-neutral terms in their essays – or face being marked down. 3rd April 2017

In January, theological college Wycliffe Hall – an offshoot of Oxford University – called for the use of gender-neutral terms when referring to God, in order to tackle gender bias .

The Daily Mail is scaremongering about a "increasingly powerful transgender lobby" made of "gender fascists". 1.3.17

The newspaper launched the attack on trans people after a story in the Sun which claimed the RAF had "banned" women from wearing skirts as part of a "transgender review". Although the RAF insisted "no decisions have been made to make any changes", and the entire story was attributed to a single anonymous tabloid source, the Mail's Andrew Pierce (who is gay) seized on the news to brand trans people "gender fascists".

The newspaper claimed "the RAF is just the latest of our institutions buckling under pressure from the trans minority. Town halls, education authorities and even some nurseries seem to be in thrall to the gender thought police."

Who is involved in the "gender fascist" movement? Well, according to Pierce the trans-führer might be Caroline Lucas, as he warns "the Green Party is involved in the clamour for every gender and sexual identity to be given rights".

The parents of trans children fear they could have them taken away following a High Court ruling.

22nd November 2016

In the case, Mr Justice Hayden ruled that a seven-year-old's mother had caused the child "significant emotional harm" through her insistence that the child born male, live as female. Since the case, at least four mothers have said their ex-partners had threatened a custody hearing. Susie Green, CEO of Mermaids UK, a trans support charity, told the Guardian that all the former partners didn't agree with the child's presentation.

"All the ones that have come through so far have been the mum who has custody and the father is unsupportive," she said. "[Fathers] have literally said, 'I've seen this [ruling]. I'm going to take you to court. Parents are very, very frightened and rightly so."

One mother said her ex, had not only launched legal proceedings, but was seeking an order banning the child from wearing girl's clothes to school. Another said her former partner is very unsupportive of her child's decision to live as a boy. "He is supposed to have the clothing that Jake wants to wear, but he doesn't," she said. She added that since the High Court ruling, she was terrified it was going to happen to her.

Sarah Cornes, head of family law at TWM, said that while the case did create a precedent, custody cases were usually "very fact-specific".

U.S.A.

Anti-gay activist Linda Harvey has claimed that transgender people are possessed by demons. 19th August 2015

A vulnerable trans girl is to be allowed to continue to use the girls' bathroom, despite a bid by her Ohio School District to stop her from doing so. 16th December 2016

Franklin Graham, a pastor who is to offer prayers at Donald Trump's inauguration, has claimed doctors should be free to refuse to treat trans people. 4th January 2017

A Catholic hospital, the St Joseph's Regional Medical Center in Paterson, New Jersey, has refused to give a trans man a hysterectomy, because, it says it follows religious directives. 6th January 2017

The hospital allegedly denied the request for surgery despite having a "patients bill of rights" which is intended to guarantee medical treatment without discrimination based on "gender identity or expression."



A transgender prisoner in California underwent gender-reassignment surgery paid for by the state this week, the first case of its kind in America. 7th January 2017

Shiloh Quine was promised that the state would pay for the procedure in 2015 after a settlement was made which stated that the US must offer treatment.

Radical feminists team up with right-wing evangelicals to oppose trans rights protections 8th February 2017

A new study has reaffirmed there are striking positive benefits to allowing transgender children to live as their preferred gender. 13th February 2017

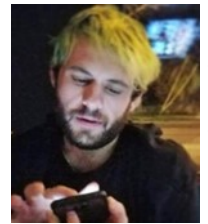
Utah has repealed an anti-gay law which bans the “advocacy of homosexuality” in schools. 21st March 2017



The first trans judge in America has been refused entry to India. 20th March 2017

27-year-old becomes first known legally agender person in the US 23.3.17

A person from Oregon has, by all accounts, become the first legally agender person in the US. Patch, a 27-year-old video game designer, also won the right to become mononymous – that is, to be known by a first name alone, with no surname. The Multnomah County Court granted Patch a “General Judgment of Name and Sex Change” March 10th.



Gender identity is widely regarded as a spectrum, but some – Patch included – do not sit on the spectrum, and instead have no gender at all. “As a kid, probably starting around age six, gender didn’t make sense to me,” Patch told NBC News. “I was told ‘men were this, women were this.’ As a teen I learned about transgender people, and that didn’t seem like what I was. And then I learned about genderqueer, and that didn’t seem like what I was.”

Patch also doesn’t use pronouns, explaining: “Even gender-neutral pronouns don’t feel as if they fit me. I feel no identity or closeness with any pronouns I’ve come across. What describes me is my name.”

Patch still faces obstacles in everyday life, however, such as official papers which assume a gender binary with M and F boxes, or which have a finite number of options. “Having a blank field still allows other genders to exist,” said Patch, adding that “you should let people opt-in to that. Forcing it is weird.”

Patch is uncomfortable with the fact that gender is still a fundamental part of every basic form people fill out, but accepted that such a radical shift will take time. I think it’s creepy that society wants to track such personal information about everybody. Why does it matter? But we do exist in that system, and since we do, we can’t just scrap it all.”

Judge Holmes Hehn told NBC News: “I made these decisions, like all decisions, because they were supported by facts and law, and out of respect for the dignity of the people who came before me.”



A major American church has appointed a transgender deacon for the first time. 8th June 2017

The United Methodist Church – one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States – made Reverend M Barclay a deacon earlier this week at the church’s Northern Illinois Annual Conference.

Deacon Barclay, who identifies as non-binary, urged the church to move toward “full inclusion”.

Vancouver says it loud and proud: ‘Trans people welcome’ 20th March 2017

Vancouver has introduced trans-friendly toilet signs in all buildings run by the city government.



Canadian bar, (Corona Tavern in the city of Medicine Hat in Alberta, threatened to kick out trans people who didn’t use bathroom of their ‘birth gender’ 28th July 2016

Pope Francis said the growing acceptance of trans people is ‘terrible’ 3rd August 2016

The Vatican has released a transcript of Pope Francis’ remarks about gender. He’s not happy with the growing acceptance of trans people in society. “Today, in schools they are teaching this to children – to children! – that everyone can choose their gender,” he said in a closed-door meeting with Catholic bishops last week. Francis claimed that the increased visibility of trans people is due to “ideological colonizing” through textbooks financed by wealthy people and institutions in “very influential countries” – which he believes is “terrible”. He declined to name any specific countries, people or institutions. He also quoted his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI: “God created man and woman, God created the world this way, this way, this way, and we are doing the opposite.”

THE PROBLEM OF TRANS ATHLETES.

There has been a lot of controversy over the eligibility of trans athletes. I have selected some interesting observations from a recent internet conversation, which seem to be useful contributions, or significant indicators of opinion:

PB - I am all for trans people getting the right to medical treatment, to be free of discrimination and violence, to be protected under employment and housing laws, etc. I think this is going too far. I would say that those who are lucky enough to acquire puberty blockers to halt male puberty, been on female hormones since their teens, and had the sex correction surgery should be allowed to compete in women's sporting events. However, male puberty has such a drastic effect on the male body, making the differences between it and the female body much more pronounced. And crucially, this is a process that cannot be reversed, which is why acquiring puberty blockers is of such importance to young trans individuals. But when trans rights and women's rights collide I stand by women. And let's be clear here: women cannot oppress trans people because we are not the class that holds power in our societies. Trans males remain males and they still hold power over women, so I can't see how women are oppressing trans males. The problem is that you flatly refuse to acknowledge that women are entitled to sex-based protections because of the oppression we face. You want to erase biological sex, which is objective, and replace it with gender, which is subjective. The fact remains, women suffer huge amounts of violence from males and should be entitled to male-free spaces. Trans males need to get their own shelters, not remove any safeguards that keep males out of women's shelters. You need to accept that, you need to understand how much abuse, threats and violence women face from the moment they're born, meaning that we are entitled to have women-only spaces. Trans males are not entitled to our spaces, it's as simple as that.

Mark - I used to think maybe the gay male with mental issues was the explanation that was right (with doubts), now I'm not so sure. I don't believe you can change sex with surgery, which has now led me down another route and another explanation for transgender, one I'm much happier with.

And that's that trans people are a unique new thing. Not that they're male, not that they're female, that they're different and a unique thing unto themselves.

Maybe they need an identity of their own. One that combines both sexes. One that has elements of both.

I know it's silly to use a fictional character, but I loved Liz Taylor from American horror story. She's actually the first trans that I feel comfortable using she for. That she had lots of female elements but didn't try to eliminate 10% of her that was male was a revelation to me. That not trying to appear completely female completed her more than any amount of fine tuning.

Sorry if I offended anyone. For the record I'm asexual and have never really been attracted to anyone. An objective observer if you will.

Dorothy - Mark your comment is eminently reasonable. But I'm afraid that it would be dismissed by the hard-line transactivists who insist that we all chant the mantra "transwomen are women", leaving no room for gender non-conformism or third sex or whatever, as transphobic.

Where I disagree with you, is in believing this is a new phenomenon; there are quite a few cultures in the world, where people who strongly object to conforming to the cultural gender-norms of their own sex, are recognised as third sex and even in some culture, fourth sex. No-one has to claim to be the opposite sex, they have a completely different alternative and that sounds a rather more cheerful state of affairs than our woefully stingy two gender norms. I'm in favour of abolishing gender altogether and allowing people to be themselves without having to try and fit into any gender box.

EM - This is ludicrous. So athletes can just say they're the opposite gender and win. They should not be encouraging this sort of behaviour. The transgenders are being deceitful and harmful to themselves.

Kate

Transwomen who don't have an operation are biologically male. There's an obvious unfair disadvantage there, even with hormone therapy. Once again women's rights come last. As I said the bright side is that the more exposure this gross unfairness gets, the more likely it will be that they'll have to address this obvious conflict of rights so that everyone's rights are respected and women's rights are not eroded or removed altogether.

ZSC - I think this is going too far. I would say that those who are lucky enough to acquire puberty blockers to halt male puberty, been on female hormones since their teens, and had the sex correction surgery should be allowed to compete in women's sporting events. However, male puberty has such a drastic effect on the male body, making the differences between it and the female body much more pronounced. And crucially, this is a process that cannot be reversed, which is why acquiring puberty blockers is of such importance to young trans individuals.



China's most popular TV hostess just happens to be trans 1st November 2016

If you thought Caitlyn Jenner was the most famous trans woman on the planet, you'd probably be wrong.

In fact, that honour surely goes to China's Jin Xing, whose TV show draws 100 million viewers a week, and who has been openly trans since 1996.

A new gender recognition bill has been submitted to the Irish Parliament on the International Transgender Day of Visibility.

31st March 2017

France's top court of appeals has upheld a ruling which forbids a person from being officially recognised as gender-neutral. 4th May 2017

Almost a decade after being forced out of the police because of her "illness," Argentinian trans woman Analia Pasantino is back – as the first trans police chief in Latin America. 12th May 2017