

I got me flowers to straw thy way;
I got me boughs off many a tree:
But thou wast up by break of day,
And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The Sunne arising in the East,
Though he give light, and th'East perfume;
If they should offer to contest
With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?
We count three hundred, but we misse:
There is but one, and that one ever.

G Herbert "Easter".

SIBYLS NEWS

Issue no.83

March 2018

Dear Sibyls

Well, it may not be *quite* Easter by the time this reaches you but near enough I hope to wish you all much joy of this blessed time.

I would like to thank those who gave me some feedback on the last newsletter. It is important to me to know what you like and what you dislike so please do take a little time to comment. Of course it is impossible to please everyone but much harder to please anyone if you do not let me know what you think. And please do not hesitate to suggest and provide contributions – the Newsletter works much better as a collective enterprise than as a one-woman affair. I must again apologise for the focus being on transwomen to the neglect of transmen and non-binary Sibyls. Any who are out there could help remedy the omission by suggesting or contributing material. As I write I am aware that having taken several steps forward we as a trans community are still in a period of retreat and reaction and appear to be taking a step backwards again. One symptom of this is the delay and apparent confusion in the government about consulting on reforms to the gender recognition act, though I recognise there are concerns about this in our own community. However, *Trans Britain* edited by Christine Burns shows how far we have come and we must be grateful to those pioneers highlighted in the book (including Tina who has contributed a chapter) whose struggles paved the way for the immeasurably better conditions that now exist for trans people. Carol has reviewed *Trans Britain* on page 24 below. Much of course remains to be done especially with the Churches. This week's *Tablet* includes an article on how Pope Francis's approach to sex and gender has been a disappointment to many LGBT Catholics. Francis appears to have a deep attachment to the theory of complementarity and the language he uses creates in many gay and lesbian and trans Catholics a strong sense of shame. And, depressingly, Cardinal Vincent Nicholas has said that schoolchildren must accept the gender into which they were born if they are to be truly happy. He suggested that only through accepting their biological sex would people ultimately find their "greatest joy". Pope and Cardinal both refer to a "gender ideology" being "imposed" on people without it apparently occurring to them that it is their own position that is "ideological" disregarding as it does the lived experience of trans people and the overwhelming scientific evidence. New Ways Ministry has published a 5-year timeline of Francis's record on LGBT issues - <https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/03/13/many-faces-pope-francis-five-year-timeline-lgbt-record/>

I hope that Tina and Chris's *Transfaith* book will prove a valuable resource for those facing intolerance or rejection in their faith communities or who are still struggling to reconcile their trans identities with their religious beliefs.

Pauline pauline.fleck@btinternet.com

M 07581553357

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THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

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

www.sibyls.co.uk E-mail: enquiries@sibyls.co.uk

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sibyls' Website - www.sibyls.co.uk

Dates and information on future events are posted on the website

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

Please note that the members' section of the website is no longer password protected although the older newsletters have been archived and still protected.

Facebook Groups

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

Forthcoming Sibyls' Events

- 15-17 June Weekend at Holy Rood House in Thirsk to launch Tina and Chris Dowd's book on pastoral care of trans people. Booking form below.
- 21-23 September Weekend at Hilfield Priory, Dorset

Other Events

- 21st April 2018 St Stephen's Canterbury CT2 7AB
FROM STONES AND SNAKES TO BREAD AND FISHES

A gathering to explore roads to inclusion of Lesbian, Gay and Trans people in Church.

12.30 Lunch

14.00 Stories and discussion

16.00 Open Table Eucharist

16.30 Tea and farewells.

All welcome: no charge but contact petertoon@aol.com to book for catering purposes.
 - 2-5 July summer school at Holy Rood House on Transition and Transformation, Identity and Integrity in church and society. Rachel Mann is a keynote speaker. Further information on Holy Rood House website by end of March.
 - Autumn (tbc) One Body One Faith Conference on Gender
-

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

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

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

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

Come in whatever role is convenient at the time

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

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

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

London Meetings for 2018

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

All Meetings start at 18:00

Susan Gilchrist

Holy Rood House Weekend 15-17 June



This weekend, which explores the theological, spiritual and pastoral insights trans people and their loved ones bring to the life of the Christian Church, is based on the findings published in *Transfaith: a transgender pastoral resource* (Darton, Longman & Todd 2018) and led by its co-authors, Chris Dowd and Tina Beardsley.

Transfaith demonstrates the yawning gap between the largely negative things that the Church has said about trans people and the extraordinary journeys of Christian trans people. The Friday evening session will offer an overview of the *Transfaith* project, and the main themes that emerged from the interviews, including the figure of Job as a transcestor.

Liturgies for trans people have been in the news recently and seem to be a source of controversy for some churches. As a response to the needs of trans people and their loved ones *Transfaith* contains no less than seven liturgies. The first session on Saturday morning will focus on liturgy.

Having completed *Transfaith* Tina and Chris are now writing a practical, 'how to do it' book to equip churches to respond to and include trans people and their significant others. Like *Transfaith* this too will be evidence based, and the second session on Saturday morning is an opportunity for Sibyls' members to contribute to that evidence.

The Bible has often been used to hurt us and so, to encourage us, as trans people, to engage positively, rather than defensively, with Scripture, *Transfaith* contains four Bible studies. The first session on Sunday morning will focus on one or more of these.

One of the evening/night prayers to be based on the Bible study on Psalm 139 and the Sunday worship will be based on the Communion Service from *Transfaith*.

There will be a Sibyls Together meeting on Sunday morning.

Holy Rood House in Thirsk is a tranquil, easily accessible haven. Thirsk is on the mainline for rail travel. For drivers, the postcode is YO7 1HX and there is plenty of parking at the venue. The station is about a mile from Holy Rood House. Staff at

Holy Rood House can pick people up from the station. The number is 01845 522580. Alternatively, if no one is available, Pauline will arrive early and have her car so give her a call on her mobile – 07581553357.

We are asked to arrive at about 4.00 p.m. Tea and cake will be there to welcome us. The weekend is fully catered. We will have exclusive use of the venue.

The cost of the weekend is £160 per person with a £5 discount for those sharing a room.

Please send the booking form, cheque and gift aid form as required to Carol Belfield, 69 North End, Ditchling, Hassocks, West Sussex BN6 8TE.

Booking Form

I/we wish to attend the Sibyls weekend from Friday 15 June to Sunday 17 June 2018.

I enclose a cheque payable to Holy Rood House for £_____

Names (s) _____

Address

Postcode _____ Tel _____

Email _____

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.....

(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 Fford Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

Gift Aid Form

Thank you for your interest in Holy Rood House.

We are a Registered Charity wholly supported by Donations from Guests, Visitors, Friends, Financial Partners, Local Organisations and some Grant Making Trusts.

These donations make possible the continuing work of the House and to be able to offer hospitality and help to others we hope you might wish to make a contribution to establish the continuing work.

A Donation is a Gift because we do not make specific charges.

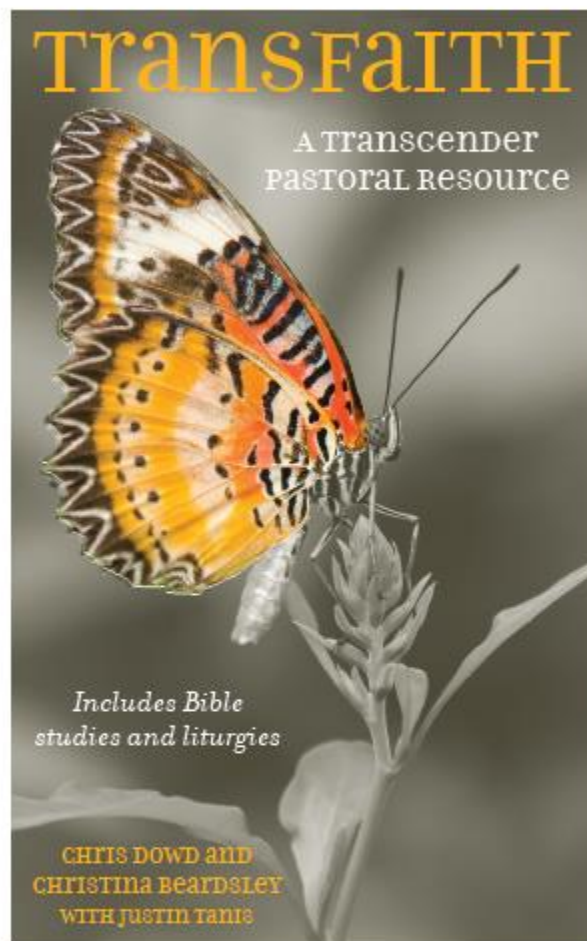
If you are a Tax Payer and can sign a Gift Aid Form (available as a .pdf download; text below) this will greatly enhance the value of your gift at no extra expense to yourself.

I, (full name please):

of (postal address):
.....
.....

I confirm that I am a Tax Payer, and that I pay **Income** or **Capital Gains Tax** to at least equal to amount of Tax to be reclaimed, and, that it is my wish to make this, and all future donations to Holy Rood House, under the Gift Aid Scheme.

Signed:Date:



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

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

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

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

Excerpt from book

"There is a marked difference between celebration and toleration of trans identity. The interviewees in mainstream churches reported they were expected to moderate their behaviour and appearance to avoid causing offence to other people in their churches. They often micromanaged their behaviours because they felt acceptance was conditional on not drawing attention to themselves. While this is clearly much better than condemnation, it is not the most nurturing environment for people who have spent most of their lives hiding. While the polite ignoring of difference may initially lead to less friction, it also invalidates. It also leaves difference as a permanent unresolved issue on the margins of the congregation's awareness. Celebration includes talking about what is unique about people and their lives. It is referring to, and addressing, their specific concerns and life experiences as part of worship and church life. It involves discussion of difference, perhaps being uncomfortable with it and dealing with it honestly. In the specific case of trans people it is the validating of life experiences by providing rites of passage."

ORDER FORM for

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

Please supply me with

please state number in numeral(s)

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

Please complete in black ink and in CAPITALS

NAME

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

.....

.....

MOBILE/PHONE in case we need to contact you.

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:

CHEQUES ONLY PLEASE – PAYABLE TO: 'MR W THORNTON'

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

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

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

**RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2017**

	2017	2016
Weekends / Days away *		
Receipts from members	570.00	4,155.00
Paid to House or for expenses	496.80	3,880.75
Surplus / (Deficit)	<u>73.20</u>	<u>274.25</u>
Advance bookings		
Deposits for various events in 2018	550.00	-
Book Royalties Received	417.33	-
Donations		
Donations to Sibyls	135.00	152.00
Donations from Sibyls - from surplus	-	200.00
Other costs		
Donation for hire of room - committee meeting	30.00	30.00
Domain Renewal	-	-
Use of group funds for members to attend meetings and events	173.00	80.00
CASH SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	<u>127.47</u>	<u>116.25</u>
Opening balance at HSBC Bank	<u>1444.09</u>	<u>1327.84</u>
Closing balance at HSBC Bank ****	<u>1316.62</u>	<u>1444.09</u>

* Not all moneys go through the Sibyls bank account as different event organisers have different approaches.

Details of the bank account for The Sibyls	Co-operative Bank
Name of Account :	Mr P A Raftery - The Sibyls
Type of Account :	Current account
Sort code :	08-93-00
Account No :	80470524

Please make cheques out to Mr P A Raftery. Electronic transfers for donations and payments are welcomed. These will require an email to be sent to the event organiser and to Peter Raftery to ensure that we can identify who has paid the money.

Peter's contact details:

Address - Mirabel, 7 Sketchley Lane, Ratcliffe Culey, Atherstone, CV9 3NZ

Mobile number - 07595776574

Note:

There is a small decrease in the closing bank balance this year of £127.47. This is due to various factors.

1. Events continue to be self-funding, which is the aim, but there was £201.05 less surplus than last year.
2. We have received £417.33 from book royalties. A word of caution - we must not rely on this as a source of income.
3. Last year we spent £550 on deposits for events in 2018 (£450 is for the anniversary dinner).
4. Donations are slightly down and we used more money to enable people to attend meetings and events.

Membership of the Sibyls does not require a subscription. We rely entirely on voluntary contributions. If anyone does feel inclined to make a regular contribution to the Sibyls, a standing order form is provided below.

Standing Order Instruction

To
Bank

Please set up the following Standing Order and debit my/our account accordingly

1. Account details

Account name

Account number.....

Account holding branch

Sort code.....

2. Payee details

Name of person or organisation you are paying: Peter Raftery The Sibyls

Sort code 089300

Account number 80470524

3. Own Reference (to show on bank statements)

4. About the payment

How often are the payments to be made – delete as appropriate:

Monthly Quarterly Yearly

Date and amount of first payment (please allow 3 working days for receipt)

(DD/MMM/YY)..... £.....

Choose one of the following two options

1. Date and amount of final payment

(DD/MMM/YY).....

£.....

2. Until further notice (payments will be made until you cancel this instruction)

5. Confirmation

Signature(s)

.....

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Please send a copy of this form to:

Mr Peter Raftery, Mirabel, 7 Sketchley Lane, Ratcliffe Culey, Leicestershire, CV9 3NZ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It would work simply by emailing me.

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

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

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

If this appeals, to get together with a couple of other Sibylys, do let me know. Yvonne Wood - softcircle@hotmail.co.uk

European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups from Elaine Sommers

This is a reminder that the Annual Conference of the European Forum in Albano, Italy (May 10 - 13) is fast approaching. At present, two Sibyls members, apart from myself, are planning to attend. It is not too late to apply.

The conference is usually attended by 120 + people from many countries around Europe. It is a real eye-opener to what work the Forum is doing throughout the year, and to mix with people of many nationalities and different Christian backgrounds.

More details about the conference at:

<https://www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu/annual-conferences/2018-albano-rome>

It would be great to see more Sibyls members at the conference. This year I am standing for re-election as co-president, as I strongly believe that the influence of the Forum is increasing and that trans people in particular have a part to play, so your attendance would be really encouraging.

Even if you aren't attending, you could lend your support to our work by making a donation to the Agape Fund. This fund enables delegates from countries with poor economic situations to attend the conference. We feel it is important that representation should not be restricted to those from the 'affluent West' of Europe. More details, including how to donate on line can be found here:

<https://www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu/donations/agape-fund>

And here's an advance notice for next year's conference, which will be in London. For Sibyls members, we will have the advantage of reduced travel costs. Put the date in your diary now - June 27 - 30. The Sibyls is one of the supporting groups for this event, and is part of the planning team, so a good attendance from our membership would be great. There will probably be a need for volunteer helpers too; more details to follow as we get them.

If you have any questions at all, do contact me at elainesommers007@yahoo.co.uk

The Hardest Part?

We all know the pain and travails many undergo to transition: surgery, hair removal etc etc. However, I can now say, having had GCS and years of painful electrolysis and laser treatment, the most difficult thing by far is.....voice training. I have just completed, after years of waiting, the 8 sessions of voice training provided by my GIC. I did some time ago also have a few sessions with Rebecca Root (who combines voice coaching with her acting and lecturing) but I felt she regarded me as a fairly hopeless case. I remember her trying to get me to relax by imagining I was a marionette being worked by strings attached to my head and arms and hands. This may stand me in good stead if I am ever asked to audition for the part of Lady Penelope in a Thunderbirds remake but it did little for my voice.

Our voice does of course let many of us down and expose us to the upset of frequent misgendering. So putting behind me my past failure I signed on for my 8 sessions, finding myself in a group of 4 other trans women. All of us would I think have scored high on any measure of anxiety. Our highly energetic and briskly no-nonsense instructor told us several times that we were the most down-beat group she had ever worked with. I have not I think felt so terrorised by a teacher since maths classes (or possibly gymnastics – I was equally hopeless at both) at school.

Each session started with exercises to help us to relax, imagining we were (not puppets this time) but seaweed. I liked the idea of being seaweed gently swaying to and fro in the waves but M's gaze on me was like the Eye of Sauron. No small lapse of body language escaped her and she seemed to take my difficulty with relaxing quite personally: "Pauline, does your left foot always move like that?" "Yes, pretty much." I did my very best to keep my knees loose and my mouth hanging open. I also did my best with the vocal exercises though some involved sounds my mouth was completely unable to make. We were constantly asked not just to make the sounds but to say what we had noticed about our own and others' attempts. Honesty, in the form of any negative comment, was not allowed. We had to perform the difficult feat of switching off our brains in order to allow sounds to naturally emerge from our bodies and then re-engage them to report on what it had felt like. I actually think this is impossible.

The sessions became a little more enjoyable when we were allowed to practise with whole sentences and bits of poems. However, terror set in again when M asked us to improvise – not repeating stuff she said or reading, but making stuff up: e.g. she asked us to talk about anything we felt passionate about and then to make up questions to each other about it. This sounds easy and I certainly learned some interesting things about my classmates (I never cease to be surprised by how many trans women love trains and railways) but it was quite hard to both make stuff up and also focus hard on exactly how we were saying it.

We had lots of homework to do. One lot of homework was to make 6 anonymous phone calls. I think I was the only one who actually managed this. I couldn't quite see the point of it unless it was to demoralise us yet further – I was duly misgendered on the first couple of calls.

So did I actually learn anything and has my voice improved? I think I am now a little more confident. Confidence I think is crucial. You have to be unafraid to let your voice go a bit and aim for something expressive and resonant with plenty of variation and tone colour. Many of us will never completely be free of the risk of being misgendered, especially on the phone but we can all improve how we speak. I am sufficiently sure of this to have arranged some private sessions with a voice coach who is himself a trans man. The first session went quite well – I successfully managed to blow a stream of bubbles through a straw into a glass of water and am learning to open my mouth while keeping my lips together. Be prepared for reports on my progress in future issues.

Mistreatment of Transgender Children – Susan Gilchrist

Twenty Catholic Bishops and religious leaders of various denominations signed a letter issued by The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the 15th December 2017, which affirmed their traditional religious position and declared that gender identity must always be determined by biological sex: The legitimacy of all transgender identities was also denied. However the views presented by these religious organisations are rejected in another open letter which is signed by at least 400 of the leading medical experts in the field. Most children will develop a gender identity that is in accordance with their biological sex but the contagion of the early development processes means that atypical gender and sexual identities can be formed. The management methods that are needed for each determination differ greatly from each other. Incorrectly identifying the type of condition means that incorrect medical diagnoses are made. The support by sections of the Church for criminalisation of homosexual behaviour and gender and sexually variant behaviour more generally, and their endorsement of the extreme penalties in some countries are a measure of the seriousness of the issues involved. The assertion by sections of the Christian Church that gender and sexually variant conditions are the results of reward driven lifestyle choices is contradicted by a worldwide consensus of medical professional institutions and by the neurophysiological and psychological research, which shows that these are driven by identity instead.

To read Susan’s whole article, go to: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/241P-MistreatingTransgenderChildrenLeaflet.pdf>

ABC Agony

“It is just irreconcilable. There are some disputes that are irreconcilable. I don’t know [where it goes] at the moment.

“What I know is we have to be faithful to the deposit of faith, the tradition of scripture. We have to be holy, above all.

“We have to be people who look like God wants us to look like. When people look at the church they should see Jesus, and really, they don’t very often, particularly when we are totally hostile to people, judgemental, unpleasant, nasty.”

He confessed that his handling of the issue had been poor, saying: “I am having to struggle to be faithful to the tradition, faithful to the scripture, to understand what the call and will of God is in the 21st century and to respond appropriately with love for all people – not condemning them, whether I agree with them or not. That covers both sides of the argument.

“I am not doing that bit of work as well as I would like to.”

He added: “The generosity I’ve received from gay friends in the midst of not handling this issue very well, and from people who are very traditionalist, has led to me being much less certain than I would have been 10 or 15 years ago.”

But the Archbishop skirted questions about whether he believes gay sex is a sin.

He said: “You know very well that is a question I can’t give a straight answer to.

“I don’t do blanket condemnation and I haven’t got a good answer to the question. I’ll be really honest about that. I know I haven’t got a good answer to the question.

“Inherently, within myself, the things that seem to me to be absolutely central are around faithfulness, stability of relationships and loving relationships.”

When Campbell pointed out that could include same-sex relationships, the Archbishop added: “I know it could be.

“I am also aware – a view deeply held by tradition since long before Christianity, within the Jewish tradition – that marriage is understood invariably as being between a man and a woman, or, in various times, a man and several women, if you go back to the Old Testament.

“I know that the Church around the world is deeply divided on this in some places, including the Anglicans and many other Churches. The vast majority of the Church is deeply against gay sex.”

Please continue to pray for Tina’s work on the Coordinating Group overseeing the teaching document on marriage and sexuality.

Dr Rob Clucas puts the position of trans people within the church well:

“I would have liked to inhabit an institutional church that believes I am wonderful because I exist; that accepts my truth as a truth worth valuing and celebrating; that recognises the prejudice that we all absorb, and helps me fight against it; that tells those who believe I am misguided, wrong, or mad, that they are the misguided ones, holding rigidly to their prejudice in the face of an overwhelming phenomenological, psychological and legal consensus that being trans is an unusual, but normal variation of being human. I would have liked to be aligned with a church that is brave enough to acknowledge that a new understanding of gender can be a Godly one, even if the secular world arrives there first. I would have liked to know an institutional church that truly practices the love that it preaches – or at least makes a better attempt at so doing. But the institutional Church of England was not this church when I was a member, and it is not this church now.

This church, I believe, is still possible.”

Congratulations Yve and Philippa

Congratulations to Sibyl Yve Taylor who gave a good account of herself on television in the South West earlier this year and who does great work at the Cathedral in Exeter. Also look out for Philippa Whittaker on R4's Beyond Belief, to be broadcast in one of 7 episodes on Mondays starting 2 April – running order not yet decided.

USA

There continues to be much to be depressed about in the ongoing onslaught by the Trump administration on the rights of LGBT people. I hope it will not deepen that depression to be reminded of the approach of Trump's predecessor, speaking of Martin Luther King:

““[Dr King's work] teaches us that we are not trapped by the mistakes of history; that we are masters of our fate.

“But it also teaches us that the promise of this nation will only be kept when we work together. We'll have to reignite the embers of empathy and fellow feeling, the coalition of conscience that found expression in this place 50 years ago.

“And I believe that spirit is there, that truth force inside each of us. I see it when a white mother recognizes her own daughter in the face of a poor black child. I see it when the black youth thinks of his own grandfather in the dignified steps of an elderly white man.

“It's there when the native-born recognizing that striving spirit of the new immigrant; when the interracial couple connects the pain of a gay couple who are discriminated against and understands it as their own.

That's where courage comes from — when we turn not from each other, or on each other, but towards one another, and we find that we do not walk alone. That's where courage comes from.”

A particularly depressing survey suggested that 1 in 3 Americans think being trans is a sin.

Book Reviews

Tina on **Michael Dillon's** autobiography:

Here's a link to my review of the autobiography of Michael Dillon/Lobsang Jivaka which has just been published on-line and which you can download for free. Written just prior to his death in 1962, the manuscript autobiography has been a source for his biographers but was only published last year; my friend Cameron Partridge was one of the editors.

It's over 60 years since Dillon/Jivaka was outed by the press and his story splashed over the papers - the media fascination with trans people is hardly new. It's wonderful that his story, told in his own words, is now available in book format; and

as the title indicates and many trans people note, coming to terms with one's gender variance is frequently a spiritual process

<http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/Y27n44UzwxswPwr4hJy2/full>

Immortal Diamond – Fr Richard Rohr

This inspiring book suggests most of us live our lives trapped within our False Selves – driven by ego and its petty, limited concerns. The discovery of our True Selves, through which we can truly know, love and be united with God and others, is the business of a life time. Fr Rohr writes: “After any “raising up” of our True Selves, we will no longer fit into many groups, even much of religious society, which is often obsessed with and yet indulgent of the False Self because that is all that it knows”. This of course may have special resonance for trans people. However, it would be simplistic merely to equate the False Self with gender identities we feel we have left behind. Fr Rohr continues: “The True Self and its resurrection are always a threat. In the Resurrection of the Christ Body, we are not talking about the resuscitation of an old thing but the raising up of what will always appear to be an utterly new thing. Resurrection is not about a man returning to his body, nearly as much as a *universal man leading us into a universal future – and doing that by making use of all the past and transforming it* (Ephesians 4:15-16).”

Speaking for myself, I would say that discovering and living in my true gender identity was an intermediate step. Most of us would perhaps agree that transitioning is not an end in itself but a means to an end. That end is the discovery of our True Selves and our ultimate unity with God. Sufferers from gender dysphoria are likely to find that until we have claimed our true gender we are unable to deal with still deeper issues of egotism and disconnection from God and others. Fr Rohr's book is an excellent guide to this process of discovery. The good news is that it is not in principle that difficult – not something only for the wise and initiated, a matter more of letting go than of earning and striving. I could fill this newsletter with quotations from the book but perhaps this one will suffice: “You do not create your True Self, or earn it or work up to it by any moral or ritual behaviour whatsoever. It is all and forever mercy for all of us and all the time and there are no exceptions. You do not climb up to your True Self. You fall into it, so don't avoid all falling. There, ironically and happily, you are finally found. And you notice your small False Self almost as a disappointing afterthought. All people have access to their True Self from their very first inhalation and exhalation, which we now know is the very sound of the sacred name Yahweh. We breathe God in and out – much more than we “know” God, understand God or even talk to God.”

PF

Trans Britain – Our Journey from the Shadows ed. Christine Burns

Unbound, London 2018

An appreciation by Carol Nixon

(I guess many Sibyls know of this new crowd-funded book – there are at least three Sibyls among the sponsors, and Tina is one of the chapter authors. I am therefore rather diffident about writing an appreciation. I feel severely under-qualified in any case, and have a horror of stating the obvious. So forgive me if you already know the book, and perhaps skip to the next article!)

‘Trans Britain’ is an unusually dense book, one whose time has come, and is very much of its time, when the prospects for trans people are opening up, but the privations of the past remain vividly alive in the memories of those who battled them. 19 reports from the coal face are brought together within a masterly summarising framework by the editor, who has as much right as anyone to stand at the centre of the story.

We read the history of the campaigns and the pressure groups which gradually transformed the dominant social context for trans people in Britain, see tragedies unfold through the eyes of people involved, taste victories on the tongues of the activists who caused them to come about, and experience once again the frustrations of the many setbacks and continuing problems.

What stands out for me is the dedication of the key pioneers, some of whom found themselves devoting much of their lives to the struggle for respect, justice and understanding for the trans community. Mark Rees in particular had no pre-existing intention to spend much of his life in litigation, but he did, and ‘Press for Change’, the group he helped to found, can be said to have achieved what it said on the tin.

While reading the central ‘Activism’ section of the book, my respect and admiration for these warriors grew with each chapter, but it made me rather sad. I lived through the whole of this period of struggle, from the 50’s to the present, but never took part. I was always too scared, inhibited, inadequate, too involved in the rest of life. I never felt motivated to make the sacrifices of time and energy and sheer intellectual effort which have made life for trans people unrecognisably better over the last 60 years. Hats off to them all!

It was revealing in our present political travails to see how important in our story the European Court of Human Rights has been. A landmark judgement there was critical in forcing the British Government to reconsider its stance on the legal rights of trans people, which led fairly quickly to the Gender Recognition Act. (Chapter 7)

The state of the media is an interesting and concerning area. The sea change from prurient sensationalism to a mainly intelligent sympathy has not happened by itself. The impressive individuals who confronted the media in constructive and restrained – but steely determined – fashion won over many hearts and minds by showing just how unthreatening, humane and sensible they were. This highlighted for me the threatening inhumanity of some of the remaining strands within the media. That fight is not yet won – maybe it never quite will be. Trans Media Watch is still busy.

Inevitably in a book with some 22 authors there are some chapters which appeal more than others. Clearly Sibyls are likely to home in on Tina's contribution. I should like to draw particular attention to the final two chapters, by Fox Fisher and Stephanie Hirst. I was especially taken with Fox's demolition of Germaine Greer's position on trans people. These final chapters are a good read and inspire with hope for the future. They make a fitting conclusion to an authoritative collection.

Scourings from the Web

Excellent Think Progress Article debunking desistance myth

<https://thinkprogress.org/transgender-children-desistance-a5caf61fc5c6/>

Everyone in family of four is trans

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/12/18/everyone-in-this-family-of-four-is-transgender/>

Marxist theory of gender

<http://isj.org.uk/marxism-feminism-and-transgender-politics/>

Dr Who legally a man (but wouldn't it be great if we could just regenerate like Jodie Whittaker and achieve an instantaneous transition?)

http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/07/17/doctor-who-we-regret-to-inform-you-that-you-are-still-legally-a-man/amp/?_twitter_impression=true

Church in Sweden to use gender neutral terms for God

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/12/29/church-tells-priests-to-stop-calling-god-he-and-use-gender-neutral-pronouns/>

Bishop of Liverpool to chair Ozanne Foundation

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2017/12/28/church-of-england-bishop-hits-out-at-trump-backing-evangelicals-as-he-calls-for-lgbt-inclusive-christianity/>

(Rt Rev Paul Bayes wrote in a blog post: "My own experience, since I began speaking out for the beginnings of change in the Church, is that I am profoundly suspected by many who disagree with me and that indeed some of them cannot in conscience remain in the same room as me, or work with me.

"This has not made me change my mind, but it does help me to understand still further what it is to be a bishop, a bastard bishop, in the Church today.")

Tom Sims great blog

<https://tomsimsblog.wordpress.com/2018/01/02/what-you-need-to-know-about-transgender-rights/>

rans doubt!" An admission of something many transgender people deal with, but few are willing to express: our struggle with doubt."

<https://transsubstantiation.com/trans-doubt-373bfe4af92c>

Susan Gilchrist: What it means to be transgendered:

<http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tgdr.co.uk%2Fdocuments%2F242P-TransgenderIdentities.pdf&h=ATNJRBPBdeA66sTSMdR27fmePGMr9blOWysBH2bG5OkKbSaFvPR0b0INge5-Grg6zMAr4nIvbsDXyPa8yh9hk20F4F2NZHd5iqnlxTNn0Nb8Ur-VST8EXx3Sa0yA6wnQOB3Bb3NZDZ-fEgB1rm9nm5OOAtHigtYh5AiQ4WRIGdy4i33vw>

Letter from One Body One Faith to archbishops about trans liturgy:

<http://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk/news/archbishops-trans-issues/>

Trans prisoners:

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/24/these-powerful-stories-from-two-trans-ex-offenders-remind-us-why-we-need-to-support-trans-rights-today/>

Tara Hudson ordeal in men's prison

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/20/tara-hudson-transgender-prisoner-sues-government>

Hunger strike

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/27/trans-prisoner-goes-on-hunger-strike-after-being-placed-in-a-mens-prison/>

More positively, the Community Innovations Enterprise Report on trans people and criminal justice system - excellent

<https://www.ciellp.net/inside-gender-identity>

And make-up lessons for trans prisoners

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/02/26/this-make-up-artist-is-visiting-transgender-prisoners-to-offer-make-up-lessons/>.

Christian Concern condemns CofE (of course):

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/26/church-of-england-angers-evangelicals-by-welcoming-transgender-people/>

April Ashley wins Oldie award

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/30/the-oldie-makes-its-award-winner-of-the-year-a-transgender-activist/>

NZ bishop says Catholic church faces Galileo moment on homosexuality (but says trans man cannot be priest)

<https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/01/10/church-faces-galileo-moment-homosexuality-says-bishop/>

New Ways Ministry attitudes survey – good progress on people in pews, but not with hierarchy:

The second highest response in the survey was for the question which asked about the attitudes of the bishops and hierarchy. 44% said that they thought the hierarchy's attitudes have become less accepting, while the ideas that they have become more accepting or that their attitudes have stayed the same each received 23% of the votes.

NWM Commentary and Interpretation: It looks like the "Francis effect" on LGBTQ issues may not be as strong as originally thought. Despite some positive statements and gestures from the pope and some of his bishop appointees, almost half of the respondents still feel that the hierarchy is moving in a negative direction on LGBTQ issues. I wonder if perhaps hurtful actions such as the ones we have seen this past year from Bishops Paprocki and Morlino have more power over people's perceptions than do the positive statements from people like Cardinal Marx, Bishop McElroy, and Cardinal Tobin, to name a few.

Rob Clucas: Trans People and CofE (disadvantages and microaggressions)

<file:///C:/Users/customer/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/6UM8C7SQ/mb.2017.2.2.pdf>

Jo Inkpin – nice article and films “Is religion about transformation or keeping people in boxes?”

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-23/australias-first-transgender-priest/9477100>

Good to see Maria Miller speaking out against anti-trans hysteria in media:

<https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/02/27/former-equalities-minister-maria-miller-slams-media-for-being-anti-trans/>

Open letter to Tim Farron (ouch):

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/12/to-sin-or-not-to-sin-an-open-letter-to-tim-farron/>

Wonderful address by Mary McAleese on misogyny in Catholic Church – everything she says about women could also apply to LGBT people:

<http://www.womensordination.org/2018/03/09/mary-mcaleese-the-time-is-now-for-change-in-the-catholic-church/>