



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered
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NEWSLETTER 29

March 2004

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2004

Thursday 15 April: 5.30 service at St Anne's, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza Company, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London

Friday 21 to Sunday 23 May – Weekend at Windermere

Thursday 10 June: 5.30 service at St Anne's, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza Company, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London

Friday 18 June: 12 noon Oasis Group at Petersfield
- ring Jackie 01489 878765

*** PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE ***

Saturday 19 June: 5.30 pm service at St Katharine's followed by dinner

Thursday 12 August: 5.30 service at St Anne's, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza Company, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London

Saturday 21 August: Strawberry Tea at St Katharine's at 4 pm

Friday 24 to Sunday 26 September – Weekend at St Katharine's

2005

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 May – Weekend at Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

Friday 23 to Sunday 25 September – Weekend at St Katharine's

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

David in ongoing illness

Abigail in Thailand for the operation

Carol, Susie and Peter all recovering nicely

Please let us know of any other prayer needs.

THE BEGGING BOWL

You will find the annual accounts as part of this newsletter. We are solvent, we are still going strong, but the bad news is that the members' funds in the balance sheet dropped from £1,079 last year to £744 this year. That's what is ours to spend.

You will see that we spend about £640 per annum on the newsletter (duplication, envelopes and postage) and the box number address. If you can accept your newsletter sent by e-mail, and have not already agreed to do so, please let Susie know (susan.heywood@virgin.net). This will save us about £1.00 per copy. We have about a year's expenditure in hand. However we want members to come to our weekends who perhaps cannot afford it and we need money for that - £300 spent last year

Please, pretty please – your money. Cheques or notes, big or small, all welcome. Each and every contribution helps.

CONTINUING MEMBERSHIP

With this newsletter are enclosed letters (pink paper) to those from whom we have not heard for sometime. If you find such a letter in your envelope, please complete the details asked for and return it to me.

If you want to continue as a member, all you have to do is fill in the bit at the bottom and return the letter. If you don't return it, then with sadness we will take your name off the distribution list. It's hard to tell when people are no longer interested in Sibyls or find membership no longer helpful. From time to time we have to ask. It costs about a £1 to send out each newsletter which we can't afford if it is not wanted.

If you haven't got a letter in your envelope, don't worry. Your name is on, and stays on, the distribution list.

ADDRESS LABELS

Again can I please ask you to check your address label? Make sure that it is exactly as you want it. We did find some errors in the changeover and want them eliminated.

DR RUSSELL REID

As quite a few of you know, Russell Reid was taken to the General Medical Council by the psychiatrists at Charing Cross for a difference of opinion in treating transsexual patients. The first committee that considered this was of the opinion that prima facie there was no evidence to answer and saw no reason not to allow him to continue to practice without restriction. However the matter may be put to a second committee relating to professional practice but no notification has yet been sent. In the light of the first decision it is difficult to see how they can rule against him.

As Sibyls will know, Russell has always been a good friend and many a Sibyl will hold him in the highest regard. He has been a lifeline for many of us and the debt that we owe him is huge. He has been of enormous help to the transsexual world.

You may wonder what part Sibyls played or could have played. There have been calls for letters of support and indeed he received about 150, including professional colleagues and the surgeons at Charing Cross. Throughout I kept in close touch with Russell and would have called for letters from Sibyls the instant he asked. In the event he had so many that there was no need. He knew that our support was always there. We wish him well.

OLWEN MORGAN

Those who have been members longer will remember; those who joined more recently need not bother.

When Russell's troubles made the news, Olwen Morgan obviously considered it the right moment to take action against him. She telephoned me to say that she intended to do so. I told her that she must do whatever she wanted but I did not approve.

She subsequently rang to say that she intended to give the infamous email to The Guardian but would not give them all the email addresses shown on its face. I agreed with her that the addresses of priests, readable names and some vulnerable people would not be given. She was adamant that she would give some addresses to The Guardian and would not accept a blanket withdrawal. She then rang to say that she would put on her web site the email without any names and tell The Guardian and the BBC what she had done.

Then there came a flurry of emails from Olwen to all the members of the email group whose email addresses she had when she was a member several years ago. She demanded confirmation from each that they had received the infamous Russell email. Should a recipient not confirm receipt to her she would release their email addresses to The Guardian. She sent about six emails, menacing and accusatory.

I discussed this with Susie and Jenny-Anne and saw no point in replying. Olwen will do exactly as she pleases. There is nothing that we can do to influence Olwen; we see no purpose in trying. In the event she wrote to say that she had sent a copy of the email with four names showing to The Guardian.

Any "outing" of any member of any group in the transgendered world is quite unacceptable.

SECURITY

This leads us again to consider security. The name and address list is held by me and by Susie. Names and addresses will not be given to anyone without permission. We try to be as secure as possible.

Email addresses are available to the email group, and it was only to the email group as constituted three years ago that Olwen sent her emails. Unfortunately some email addresses include the name in the address and thus make the recipient's identity only too clear. I would recommend that users think hard about this and perhaps use more coded addresses to make their identity less obvious.

The Sibyls has only one rule i.e. "Members must respect the security of each and every other member, and must never jeopardise that security." That rule can only work with the active compliance of all members and becomes impossible when it comes to former members.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

February broke all records. Five people came. We are on the up and up. Seriously the service is thoughtful and good, the meal and ambience are fine. These are evenings I enjoy very much. It has a lot to do with the company. Just come.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, Soho, Dean Street, 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (look for the sign, it doesn't look like a church but it is), followed by a gathering at the Gourmet Pizza, Swallow Street, just off Piccadilly (opposite St James's) from 6.30. Next meeting, Thursday April 15. Every other month.

OASIS MEETING AT PETERSFIELD – FRIDAY 18 JUNE AT NOON

The next meeting will be held in June, noon on Friday 18th. All those who have been know how enjoyable they can be. Find out. Give Jackie a ring first to confirm.

ST KATHARINE'S MEETING – SATURDAY 19 JUNE

The January meeting at my house went very well. Four people only came, but Martin Kelly held a lovely communion service while we sat round the dining table after which we enjoyed a long chat over the rather excessive buffet. It was a good evening but it made me think.

With the committee's blessing, I have been exploring the idea of holding evening meetings at St Katharine's. I have talked this over with Michael and the suggestion is that we should hold three or four Saturday meetings there along the lines of the Strawberry Tea but without the strawberry tea. In other words a service and a leisurely evening meal. Michael feels that as St Katharine's gets busier, there will be no problem in finding a room for us for a meal, and a few extra dinners when they are cooking anyway will keep the cost down.

The advantages of St Katharine's are that I don't have to do the catering and that travelling will be easier, being nearer to Central London. It also means that people can stay overnight if they wish. St Katharine's offers privacy and safety, and a Saturday evening is more convenient for many.

We have booked Saturday 19 June as a first date to see how it goes. There will be a short service followed by a dinner, probably in the Chapter Room. Should be good. The cost will be £15 per head, including wine. The only snag is that you will have to book and prepay me. Booking form at the end.

WEEKEND AT WINDERMERE – MAY 21 - 23

Time to remind you of the above; time grows short. This weekend usually sells out; book now to avoid disappointment. A booking form is attached.

Following my wish to stand down from actually running a weekend at the time, I'm very pleased to say that Carol Nixon and Jenny-Anne will be taking over the hosting duties. I'm very grateful to them and haven't the faintest doubt that they will do a good job, much better than I. It never was me; I'm better at making arrangements than being up front. Moreover it gives me a chance to really look forward to being there.

The other good news is that the Rev'd Denise Megson will be taking our communion service on the Sunday morning. Those of you who have been to previous weekends at Windermere will know Denise, the Locum Director at the Centre. She has always taken a keen interest in us and I'm glad that she will be doing this for us. At a URC centre, it seems only right that we should have a URC communion.

It should be a good weekend. I'll look forward to seeing you there.

SIBYLS E-MAIL GROUP - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sibyls>

Susie

This was initially established by Chelle Phillips, was subsequently re-vamped by Michelle O'Brien and presently has 20 or so members. We watch the press and the Internet, sharing items of potential interest. The group's roles are primarily support, prayer requests, information and an additional link for those who may not be able to be with us any other way. Contact me (susan.heywood@virgin.net) for further details, or to join.

Newsletters, and some other mailings, which are on computer, can be sent by e-mail to those who are so equipped and to whom this is acceptable. Each newsletter costs about £1.00 to copy and post so there are cost savings to be made. If you are agreeable to receiving an electronic copy only, please let me know by sending a note to that effect to susan.heywood@virgin.net. 11 members have so far decided to try it. The distribution list will be annotated accordingly. **This option is not final**; if you subsequently decide that electronic issues are not for you, you are welcome to revert to the paper version.

THE OCTOBER 2003 WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE

I am happy to say that Helen's account of an excellent weekend can be found in this newsletter.

VAL'S BOOK – "CHANGE OF LOVE" BY VALERIE FRANCE

Don't forget that *Change of Love* by Valerie France is available from Outpress, Langdale House, 11 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EN. Price £7.99 plus £2.00 P&P.

On page 6 is a review of the book by Sandra Moore.

WEEKEND AT ST KATHARINE'S – 24-26 SEPTEMBER

It will be good to be back in St Katharine's again, now that it is modernised, refurbished and extended. It will open in May. All rooms have en suite facilities (bearing in mind the needs of dilating Sibyls, one or two have baths) and there are rooms specially equipped for disabled people.

The feature of the weekend will be listening training. We talked about this at Holland House and agreed it to be a good idea and potentially helpful to the group. I am glad to say the Rev'd Dorothy Nicholson will be running the training sessions on the Saturday. Dorothy has been to us before at St Katharine's and I hold her in the highest regard. She will teach us well and it will be fun.

Otherwise there will be all the usual features. Come and celebrate the return. A booking form is attached. Sadly the cost has gone up but we were very fortunate to be able to be welcome for so many years at such a low price. For en suite facilities, full board and wine, and everything else, it remains a fantastic bargain.

THE PERSONAL PRONOUN – THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

Jay

At a recent meeting, a Sibyl referred to me as "he". Now that might have been a slip of the tongue (repeated several times) or it may be telling me something I need to know. At another meeting another member was referred to as "he" and was so upset by this that she has no intention of going back again. Knowing the circumstances, I can't disagree with her decision. This has been happening too often lately.

Having made the transition, the last thing one expects is that members of a group such as this should not have the courtesy to refer to each other by the correct pronoun. By what right do we expect the law to be changed to give us full status if we cannot treat ourselves correctly? I know mistakes happen, that people can say things that they don't really mean, that old habits die hard. However can we please make a bit more effort to be considerate of each other?

THE LEGAL STATUS OF TRANSSEXUAL PEOPLE

The Gender Recognition Bill has been making excellent progress. It cleared the House of Lords and received its Second Reading in the Commons on February 23rd by 325 votes to 26. It went into Committee Stage on March 9 when it will be examined line by line.

The only significant change was to allow organised sport to set its own rules for eligibility for competitions, a reasonable concession. Organised religion has tried hard for various exemptions but has been denied – so far. The Government has taken the view that religious bodies can discriminate but no further rights to do so should be set in legislation.

There has been considerable fuss about priests being required to marry transsexuals. The Bill is quite clear. Priests in the Church of England and the Church in Wales have a specific conscience clause that they are not required to take weddings if their conscience does not allow. This is because they are legally required to marry those who ask. All other priests and ministers may refuse because that is their right anyway.

The Evangelical Alliance has run a strong campaign against the Bill. The impression that I get is this has been detrimental to their cause as people are put off by their lack of charity. The important thing to bear in mind is that the Government is whipping the Bill and the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are allowing free votes. There are more than enough votes to carry it.

BOOK REVIEW - “CHANGE OF LOVE”

Sandra Moore

Can I say how glad I was to follow up Jay’s recommendation to read Valerie France’s book “Change of Love”? I strongly recommend it.

It actually worked on me like a chemical catalyst. I found and find a whole crowd of ideas positively bubbling up after reading it. It actually opens out a whole “roadway” of questions with intersections, roundabouts and junctions (and possibly also dead ends) that invite exploration; about Christianity, the Church, gender, modern relationships and business ethics, to name only a few.

One question has seemingly lived on in me longer than the others, and if you read the book you will see why maybe.

An old chestnut in Christian debate is about the idea of “justification by faith and not by the works of the law” etc. I suppose this can take many meanings, let alone the (at first, to me) incomprehensible expression “justification by faith”. Justification of what?

However further inspection seems to show that St Paul’s meaning may have been, “To be close to God you have to be right in your heart; faithful to the divine in your feelings, and merely copying externally what is considered correct action is in no way sufficient.” Probably most people would agree.

“Change of Love” shows a great many people engaged in hurried lives dedicated to external success of one sort or another. Even though their activities are broadly of a type supposed to help human life, (the health industry) one sees that their hearts are not in it and this leads to illicit liaisons etc. In other words when work does not occupy one’s love forces, the love forces seek elsewhere for fulfilment.

It struck me how our society has become incredibly work dominated in this sense; pursuing outward goals, targets and successes, and overlooking something else. It made me aware of a sort of universal “unfaithfulness” which is not primarily a sexual matter but a psychological spiritual one. It is as if one became self-aware of a kind of universal preoccupation with “works”, no longer dedicated to “God”, except in the sense of a God of remote technological necessity. One almost hears this impersonal God speaking to itself via us, “Strive for outer success and then die”. A sort of Faustian temptation.

But from “Change of Love” came for me an unexpected view of the meaning of “faithfulness”. The central character emerges slowly. She is almost a tangential figure at first and the surprises lead to further surprises.,

Yet despite it all, she seems “justified” in the Augustine-Luther sense, or perhaps not in the way they meant it but in an updated sense. Her first loyalty becomes clear by the end of the book. We all do some things which were not really what we loved but are driven by externalities. But love is a function of the heart and this is where faithfulness to one’s true being is born and never dies.

So thank you Valerie France.

THE WORD OF GOD?

By Michelle Le Morvan

The phrase “the Bible is the Word of God” is constantly bandied about. What does it actually mean? Did God speak to the author as if he was using a Dictaphone? It seems totally unlikely. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the human author was rather more than an inanimate machine. There are the contradictions, the different types of literature (e.g. narrative, poetry, legal texts, even myth) and the obvious selection of materials from different sources e.g. parallel passages in Kings and Chronicles. No, the Bible has two authors, a human author (who is a full author in his own right) and, working with him, a divine author – the Spirit of God. The mystery lies in the fact that both are full authors and each complements the other. Because of this we have to be very careful about dogmatism in the biblical text – and most Christians are not. We see this as glaringly obvious in Creationism, where literalism shows a complete inability to comprehend different kinds of literature.

It is in this context that we need to view Genesis 1:27, a text used by many to condemn transgenderism. There are two accounts of Creation at the beginning of Genesis. They are Genesis 1:1-2:4a, and Genesis 2:4b-4:26. They are apparently contradictory but the second is a mythological narrative whose main concern is to explain the deep truth about the origin of evil. It does it so well that a child can readily understand it.

But what about the first account? The context of the account is the Babylonian exile. In Babylon the great celebration was the rebirth of each New Year. Obviously the Jewish exiles would not join in this to Marduk and the other pagan gods. Indeed they had their own chant of celebration. Genesis 1 is a liturgical hymn of celebration, i.e. it is poetry and music, not dogma. There is even a chorus line “and God saw that it was good”. When the song speaks of the creation of humanity it is celebrating the obvious – that humanity consists of men and women, who reflect God’s own life. It is not trying to say that there are only men and women and no transgendered people. It links in with Psalms 104, 148, 8 and 29 to mention just a few, and with canticles such as “The Song of the Three Young Men” in the furnace in Daniel 3: 57-88 (in the Deuterocanonical books).

In interpreting the Bible we must always see the text in its context. In fact Genesis 1 does not name the sun and the moon (vs 16-18) but speaks of them as “light” (Greater and Lesser) because the author would not name them; they were among the gods of Babylon. When challenged always enquire if the speaker knows the context of the text. The text was not dictated by God.

INTERSEX AND TRANSEXUAL PEOPLE’S MEDICAL EXPERIENCES

Last year I began doing research into the social consequences of being intersex and/or transsexual. I am focussing on people’s experiences of the medical profession, and how this has affected them.

Before the 1970’s, many homosexuals were treated for what was then regarded as a mental illness, and had very negative experiences as a result. In the past five to ten years, it has become more

widely known that many intersex children received treatment (surgery and gender reinforcement) for their “conditions”. Many are never told about this treatment, some find out about it later in life because of associated medical or psychological problems, including gender dysphoria, some live with a vague unease that something doesn’t quite fit. The relationship between intersex and transsexual identity is a complex one, largely because of the secrecy that frequently surrounds the former.

Some transsexuals have reported dissatisfaction with the restricted access to treatment; others have later come to regret the treatment they had. Openly gay and lesbian people sometimes report being subject to prejudice by medical staff. Some transsexual and intersex people have had similar experiences. I am not looking solely for negative experiences, simply trying to get people’s stories about how they were treated in an area full of myth and lacking detail.

I am doing the research because there has been so little official follow-up in the UK. It is important to look into this because research shows that increasing numbers of people in the West are experiencing problems with their reproductive systems. The effects range from infertility, malformation and cancer, to intersex conditions. While intersex conditions have been around for a number of years it seems that the incidence is increasing, and the cause may be environmental pollution amongst other things.

I am asking for people from these communities to share their stories about medical intervention and how it has affected them. I am looking primarily for people who had any kind of genital or gonad anomalies, and/or people who felt discomfort with their assigned gender role and gender identity. People who had surgery; people given hormones to aid development; people who had psychiatric intervention; people who are aware they did not have these, despite falling into the categories of people who do; people who had dealings with the medical establishment and who feel that their identity had an effect on the treatment they received.

This not a statistical study, it is people’s experience that is being looked at. I am also open to hearing stories by members of the medical profession, care workers, parents or partners involved with people who had such experiences. This study is independent, and any information given will be treated in strictest confidence. Where information is used, it will only be with agreement, and anonymously, without attribution. This is the first time this research has been done in the UK.

If you are interested in participating, contact me, **Michelle O’Brien**, for an informal chat:

020 8392 3455, 07966 448 934, or: michelle.obrien@roehampton.ac.uk

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If you have any concerns raise them with myself, David Woodman (Deputy Head of School) – 020 8392 3091, D.Woodman@roehampton.ac.uk, or Lorraine Radford (Project Supervisor) – 020 8392 3475, L.Radford@roehampton.ac.uk

STOP PRESS

Following a suggestion by Christina Beardsley, it has been agreed that Sibyls should produce a book on Transgenderism and Christianity. The Evangelical Alliance has published the booklet “Transsexuality” and The Church of England “Some Issues in Human Sexuality”. These need to be challenged; the record should be set straight. We envisage a series of essays, medical and theological, interspersed with real-life experiences. Helen Savage will edit, assisted by Susie Withers and Michelle Le Morvan. More anon.

Love and Prayers

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

AUTUMN IN EVESHAM – HOLLAND HOUSE OCTOBER 2003

Helen Mather

The Sibyls' autumn weekend was held at Holland House, in Crothorne, about 12 miles from Worcester, our second new venue this year.

This time I'd no directions at all, just the name of the village; I **had** looked at the map, though. Still, it was a relief when I saw the sign to Holland House. There at last! And in good time. A little side-road led to a car-park seemingly set in a huge garden. Yes, there was the name....

A path bordered by low box hedges led ever upwards among the lawns. From a distance, I caught glimpses of a large black-and-white house. In front of the house was an equally large cottage garden, with tables and chairs set among the flowers. But what's this? 1904? There it was, over the gable. This house isn't what it seems! But it's delightful for all that. Jay met me at the door with her usual welcome. Inside, the house is all dark wood, with a wide staircase leading up from the open hallway to....? Another mystery, never solved. First, though, my room. Not in the main house, but in the annexe. Lots of corridors and stairs. It must be a requirement for all retreat houses! And now for my bags. Lovely garden, but it's a long, long way back to the car. There at last. I wonder what's at the **bottom** of the garden. Down a steep grassy slope: lots of steps to.... Water? A canal? No, the river Avon! And a little mooring with a narrow boat, too.

Back to the luggage. Three trips should do it. It's a long haul - I shouldn't bring so much.... I'm certainly getting to know the route to my room. Lots to see in this corner of the house. There's a marvellous paper sculpture on the landing, and spider plants on every windowsill (yours to take home for a donation). Funny, I never did find the parent....

But **at last** there's time to sit down for coffee and a natter until dinner.

The weekend proper starts with dinner, and by now all but a few latecomers had arrived. The dining room is the oldest part of the house, a remnant of the original cottages; low ceiling, dark beams and pillars everywhere. Very atmospheric. And there's wine on the tables tonight: nice touch. Could do with a few candles....

After dinner, it was straight to business: back into the lounge for coffee and an update by Jay on the Gender Recognition Bill (the "gerbil", Abigail called it. "Has it teeth?" she asked). Business done, we moved to the Chapel for Night Office. Susie led as usual on the first night. The Chapel's not a large room, and is one of our more intimate settings. It's hardly bigger than the lounge: there's room for thirty or so chairs, but it has a traditional layout and proportions. The table stands apart at the east end (which actually faces west!) with a clear-glass window behind, taking up the full height of the wall, up to a high, steeply pitched roof. But it's dark outside now - I wonder what's through that window....

This wasn't Susie's normal mini-Compline, but a short meditation on the theme of judgement and justification, or, God's way of seeing us. It was nicely done: five readings with linking thoughts; all written down and easy to follow.

We returned to the lounge for talk / wine / catching up on news / swapping photographs; in other words, whatever you do on the first night of a Sibyls weekend.

I don't think it was late when I went back to my room, but late enough. I just cleared the bed, then went to sleep....

I woke at about 0730 to a calm morning. That's late for me. I must have been tired: I'd missed all my usual Saturday morning radio programmes. And now the sun rising over the roofs behind me was just lighting up the tops of the trees round the lawn below my room. I wonder what the sunrise looks like from the Malvern Hills....

First, tidy up last night's chaos and find some clothes for today. Is there time for a shower? Yes, if it takes five minutes. Oh, dear! So I was 10 minutes late for breakfast, and the others were well into things, some by now investigating the mysteries of the toaster.

After breakfast we went next door into the Chapel for a meditation, led by Michelle, who spoke so powerfully at our last weekend. Now, in the daylight, we could see beyond the window. A huge expanse of clear glass looked out onto the garden. Who needs stained glass?

We started by reading a part of Psalm 104 (vv 2b-9, 24, 31, 35b), a powerful song of creation. Michelle followed with her own thoughts.

She started with a review of our perception of space from the time of Kepler to the present - a time of broadening horizons. She then introduced the idea of creation as a "sacred space". There is a unity within nature; nature is God's footprint. (At this moment, I was enjoying my own personal bit of creation - looking at a shaft of sunlight illuminating a huge nest of cobwebs high in the roof. Has anyone else noticed it? Oh dear, must pay attention!) She described another space, an "inner space" within ourselves. The challenge is for each of us to find our own solitude within. All things are part of creation, therefore all things are one, and the call to this inner space is a call to the unity of creation. We must find ourselves; God and each other, for all are one. If we seek space within, there we find everything. There is a unity of all things in creation. Michelle reminded us how Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning together (Romans 8:19-22), waiting for the revelation of God's glory in us. She finished our time together by reading a native North American prayer; how like our own Christian tradition this is, yet half a world and a different culture away! Here is a shared revelation; surely all things **are** one. And there is here an intense respect for the creation which we do well to remember.

We moved back into the lounge, where we were joined by the Revd. Peter Knight, a local prison chaplain, who led our morning sessions.

He'd borrowed a picture from the Chapel to start his discussion; a small painting, based on Rublev's icon "the Trinity", or "the hospitality of Abraham". This icon describes the account of the visit of three men to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18), and plays on the implication that the messengers and God himself are one (v.10). So this is a picture of the Trinity, at the same time expressed obliquely in terms of the three visitors. These figures are both angels and God. Peter first invited us to examine the picture. It shows a table set for a meal: a table with one free place, and an invitation to all to share....

We then considered angels. Angels in the Scriptures are messengers, as they are here. So, are all potential angels? This brought to mind the text on "entertaining angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). **These** unnoticed angels don't announce their presence: no halo, no wings. God uses all sorts of ways to speak....

After coffee we continued with the "entertaining angels unawares" theme, discussing and sharing unexpected experiences of God's presence. Three memorable remarks stand out:

The first followed a comment by Jay on instances of thinking of people at just the right time; she called it the "connectiveness of all people":

Jesus was a complete human being; there's lots in **us** (perceptive talents) that's switched off.

The second:

You are you, wherever you go....

and the third, from the television series "dinner ladies" (at its happy conclusion):

"Will we live happily ever after?"

"No, we'll be all over the place b*****ing things up"

"But do you still love me?...."

Is this a picture of God and us?

Peter summed it all up in two phrases:

God often speaks obliquely, in parables.

Whatever I say you can debate and discuss, but whenever God speaks you act on it.

After a short discussion with Peter, Jay announced that we would have the Communion now, before lunch, to give us the afternoon free. I can't help wondering whether this was my doing. I'd only asked if there'd be enough time for an errand in Worcester. It was worth asking! Peter led the Communion service, the short, intimate service that I encountered and came to love on my

first Sibyls weekend. He began with an invitation for all to our shared meal; indeed he thought that this should always be the first invitation to outsiders....

We started with a hymn, then a reading of Psalm 29, showing God's splendour and power in creation. This was echoed by the Collect Peter had chosen. The two readings, Genesis 18 and John 1 picked up on the morning's theme.

I found the Confession interesting. In its place was a prayer of reconciliation and forgiveness, first addressed by Peter to us, then us to him. The Peace (many hugs!) followed straight after, then the Communion proper, with everyone sharing the bread and wine, each to the next....

After the problems we'd had at Whaley Hall, we'd arranged to take the group photograph today. The large lawn behind the house makes a lovely setting. The garden faces west, and is sheltered by the house in the morning. But by now, the sun had come out beautifully. Perfect. We had a lovely relaxed, light-hearted time - no rushing, and plenty of time to get things right.

After lunch we sat out in the garden in the afternoon sun, talking over coffee.

I'd planned to go out, but stayed nattering until nearly 1500 - so what's new? I **did** get away finally, and not too late, either. My errand complete, I decided to return from Worcester - *via* Malvern. The detour was well worthwhile. It was beautiful; the trees on the hills all gold and green, glowing in the afternoon sunshine. Everybody seemed to be out walking today. I got back in time for a plainchant service of Compline given by *Musica in Ecclesia*, a local group who specialise in singing plainsong services. So different and very interesting. So there **is** another way of doing the Psalms (I really **do** like Anglican chants, honest). Mind, you need a strong voice and lots of stamina!

There was a little time to tidy before dinner, but only just time to change for the entertainment. I escaped being MC this time - someone else had offered! and was able to wander around as the photographer. I think I'd rather do that! (I'm shy, really).

We stayed in the lounge nattering afterwards, but only until midnight this time. Early for once! As there wasn't any late service after the entertainment, I'd overlooked the usual silence in the Chapel. So I ended my evening in the almost dark Chapel. No view of the garden now; it was completely dark outside except for the bright white star Vega shining through the window. And so to bed; tidy up, then fall asleep listening to Beethoven's third symphony on my radio....

Wake up! it's Sunday. Early this morning. Good. I need to tidy up to go home - but so soon? Plenty of time for a shower today. Someone has the same idea though; just **who** turned the tap on next door? No pressure. Can't get a shower kneeling down! But there's no real rush. And between breakfast and Morning Office I'd even time to take the first things to the car, **and** to look round the hidden corners of the still-dewy garden....

We'd been joined by Diane, who'd finally arrived by boat (we'd expected her all weekend). It seems that she'd been hijacked on the way (that's not right; **sidetracked** wasn't it? Oh, well.) Jenny-Anne's service was a mini-Morning Prayer. As her theme she'd chosen our common difference: at the same time a "gift and problem". As she said: "Nature delights in diversity". We started with Psalm 100: an invitation to us to worship, as we are....

The two readings from Isaiah (Is. 40:27-41:1 and Is. 56:1-7) speak of God's understanding and encouragement. And the prayers sought to put our transgendered status in perspective. We finished with the Lord's Prayer and the Grace, and the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy": a good traditional hymn, and a chance for a good sing. I needed that!

We didn't leave straight away. Somehow, a discussion started on giving out jobs: we decided that God is "easy to please but impossible to satisfy: he will have his way" (Suzanne) and that "he is a good manager, and gives us jobs we **can** do" (Susie).

We returned to the lounge for Sibyls Together (the nearest we have to a parliament, says Jay). "Don't think this is democracy: Sibyls is actually an anarchy and it's run as a tyranny". So now you know!

This was one of our longer Sibyls Together: a full, but friendly discussion. We had been joined by the Revd. Georgina Everingham, who was to lead our Communion service. Georgina, a Trans-woman herself, is a priest in the Worcester diocese, and had been invited on the Bishop's recommendation. She had copies of her book "Gender reassignment and the Bible", (her own personal testimony) with her, which she thought would be a useful resource.

Today's Communion service was more formal than yesterday's, and followed the Anglican Common Worship liturgy.

Gina had based her talk "Knowing God" on the readings set for today (Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 4:12-1 and Mark 10:17-30)

She started by considering the reading from the prophet Amos:

What's in the heart? Seek good, not evil.... perhaps the Lord will have mercy (5:14a, 15b). Motives are also important in the young man's question (in Mark): "What must I do?" Jesus' reply "**Why** do you call me good?" tested his grasp of the situation.

We must let God's word search our hearts (Hebrews 4:12), and let God open our hearts to him, for "all fall short of the Glory of God".... (Romans 3:23).

The disciples understood the message, and replied: "then who can be saved?" (Mark 10:26). Jesus' answer "what is impossible with man is possible with God" (Mark 10:27) reminded us of the same promise to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:14), and also to Mary (Luke 1:37). So, she explained, we need a priest - a **perfect** priest who offers a perfect and a sufficient sacrifice. Hebrews tells us that Christ is my priest. He is all I need, and in him I am perfect. Then let us hold fast to the faith (Heb. 4:14). Let us approach the throne (boldly), because he understands - he's "been there, done it".... and we shall receive mercy to help in time of need. Finally, Gina reminded us of Jesus' own invitation: "Come to me and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28).

Prayers followed the Sibyls tradition; each offering their own prayer, with a lighted candle. Michelle summed them up: "For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, **YES!**" After communion we finished the service with the hymn "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah" (another Sibyls tradition, and a "must-have" for the weekend. Anyway, it's a good sing!)

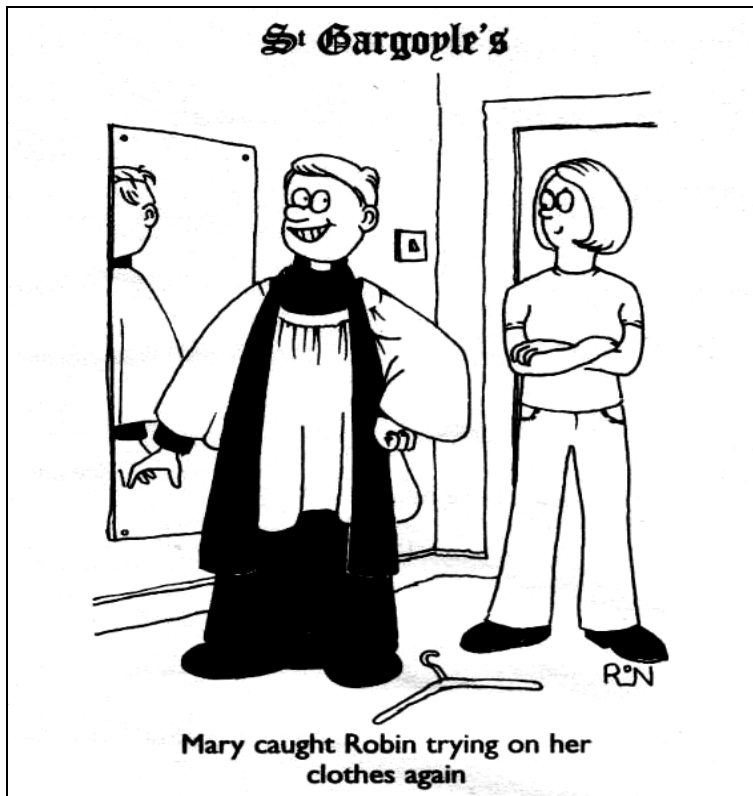
We knew that the weekend was almost over; it was straight into lunch and a last chance to share time together over a meal.... Not quite the end, though. After lunch, the Warden wished us safe journey and delivered a surprise: chocolates on the house to take home!

But now, it **was** time to go home. There was just a little time together over coffee, as guests moved their bags into cars and prepared to leave. It's surprising what you can find to do: talking, swapping addresses, and other tasks forgotten in the busyness of the weekend. I don't think we really wanted to go. But however reluctant we were, it was time, and we said our goodbyes one by one, and left. I stayed a little longer for a last look round the gardens and to take photographs I hadn't had time for earlier. But there was now no more excuse to stay. Everything was in the car. So, I'd just to pick up some sweets for the journey and a piece of the ubiquitous spider plant for my own windowsill and go....

And so back to the real world, refreshed and encouraged. This had been one of my best Sibyls weekends; maybe not the most moving, but definitely one of the most enjoyable.

The last word comes from Sibyls Together: do we like Holland House? **YES!**

So we'll be back.



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group
For the Transgendered

EVENING AT ST KATHARINE'S SATURDAY 19 JUNE 2004

Name.....

Address
(if not as per your address label)

.....

.....

Phone No.

Any special dietary requirements

Please reserve me a place or places at the above evening @ £15 per head.

Cheque payable to "Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls" enclosed £.....

THE SIBYLS
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT
YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2003

	2003	2002
RECEIPTS		
From members in respect of meetings	3,661.50	3,344.00
Use of group funds	300.00	308.00
Meeting receipts	3,961.50	3,652.00
Donations	676.45	454.80
Advance bookings	226.00	71.00
Sale of Booklet	2.50	-
Recovery of Woking deposit	-	100.00
Bank interest	1.55	1.85
	<u>£4,868.00</u>	<u>£4,279.65</u>
PAYMENTS		
Cost of Meetings:-		
Paid to House	3,841.50	3,737.00
Speakers	50.00	300.00
Coach trip	-	105.00
Extras	30.00	36.20
Meetings Costs	3,921.50	4,178.20
Use of group funds for members to attend meetings	300.00	308.00
Holland House deposit	-	120.00
Newsletter duplication	452.26	399.22
Newsletter postage	118.37	132.10
British Monomarks box number	65.80	58.75
	<u>£4,857.93</u>	<u>£5,196.27</u>
CASH SURPLUS/(DEFICIENCY)	10.07	- 916.62
Opening balance at HSBC Bank	1,030.73	1,947.35
Closing balance at HSBC Bank	<u>£1,040.80</u>	<u>£1,030.73</u>
Made up of:-		
Members' funds	743.80	1,079.73
Holland House Deposit	-	- 120.00
Windermere advance bookings	108.00	-
Advance bookings	189.00	71.00
	<u>£1,040.80</u>	<u>£1,030.73</u>

These accounts are prepared on the receipts and payments basis, consistent with last year.

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT - MEETINGS

	Whaley Hall - May	Strawberry Tea	Holland House- Sep	2003 Total	2002 Total
Cash receipts from members:-					
This year	1,558.00	104.00	1,999.50	3,661.50	3,344.00
Last year				-	630.00
Use of group funds	232.00		68.00	300.00	308.00
	<u>£1,790.00</u>	<u>£104.00</u>	<u>£2,067.50</u>	<u>£3,961.50</u>	<u>£4,282.00</u>
Paid to House	1,790.00	104.00	1,947.50	3,841.50	3,737.00
Deposit paid previous year			120.00	120.00	100.00
Speakers			50.00	50.00	300.00
Coach trip				-	105.00
Extras			30.00	30.00	36.20
	<u>£1,790.00</u>	<u>£104.00</u>	<u>£2,147.50</u>	<u>£4,041.50</u>	<u>£4,278.20</u>
SURPLUS/(DEFICIENCY)	<u>£0.00</u>	<u>£0.00</u>	<u>-£80.00</u>	<u>-£80.00</u>	<u>£3.80</u>



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group
For the Transgendered

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey CR3 0AN

☎ 020 8763 0146

WEEKEND AT ST KATHARINE'S

24-26 SEPTEMBER 2004

Name.....

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room

Address
(if not as per your address label)

.....

.....

Phone No.

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch	£100.00
24 hour overnight full board	£ 50.00
Saturday day visitor – lunch, tea/coffee and dinner (Deduct £5.00 if staying for only one meal)	£ 25.00
Day visitor – Friday supper only	£ 10.00
Sunday lunch only	£ 15.00

If you are not coming for the full weekend please specify the days/times for which you are booking

.....

Cheque payable to “Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls” enclosed £.....

Any special dietary requirements

Any other special needs

Please send this form with your cheque to Jay Walmsley asap



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group
For the Transgendered

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey CR3 0AN
☎ 020 8763 0146

WEEKEND AT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE 21-23 MAY 2004

Name.....

Required - Single/twin room/triple (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant(s) in room

Prepared to share with

Address
(if not as per your address label)

.....

.....

Phone No.

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Mini-bus outing	£18.00
(to be booked and paid for in advance)		

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch	£90.00
---	--------	-------

24 hour overnight full board	£45.00
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Day visitor – Saturday lunch and tea/coffee	£6.00
(add £2 if you want breakfast)		

Day visitor – evening meal/Sunday lunch	£15.00
---	--------	-------

If you are not coming for the full weekend please specify the days/times for which you are booking

.....
Cheque payable to “Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls” enclosed £.....

Any special dietary requirements

Any other special needs

Please send this form with your cheque to Jay Walmsley asap