



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered
BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

36 Salmons Lane
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NEWSLETTER 34

June 2005

☎ 020 8763 0146

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY **2005**

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|---|--|
| Saturday 9 July | Garden Party chez Jay - ring Jay 020 8763 0146
(Note change of date) |
| Saturday 16 July | 3:30pm to 6:30pm MCC Manchester and Sibyl's Service at St. Michael's Flixton, followed by a meal at Zorba's Restaurant, Chorlton. Contact Jenny-Anne 01606-783035 or jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk. |
| Sunday 24 July | Communion at St James, Piccadilly, at 11 am, followed by Sunday lunch - ring Jay 020 8763 0146 |
| Thursday 11 August | 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza Company, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London |
| Saturday 20 August | 3:30pm - 6:30pm MCC Manchester Discussion Group meeting at St John Chrysostom's Church S. Manchester Followed by a meal at SanGam on Curry Mile. Contact Jenny-Anne 01606-783035, jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk or go to www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm |
| Saturday 10 September | 3:30pm - 6:30pm MCC Manchester Discussion Group – see Saturday 20 th August for details. |
| Friday 23 to Sunday 25 September | Unique/MCC Weekend at Bournemouth |
| Thursday 13 October | 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Soho – see Thursday 11 August for details. |
| Friday 14 October | 12 Noon - Oasis Group at Petersfield - ring Jackie 01489 878765 |
| Saturday 15 October | 3:30pm - 6:30pm MCC Manchester Discussion Group – see Sat 20 th August for details |
| Friday 18 to Sunday 20 November – Weekend at Holland House, Worcestershire | |
| Saturday 26 November | 3:30pm - 6:30pm MCC Manchester Discussion Group – see Sat 20 th August for details |
| Thursday 8 December | 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Soho – see Thursday 11 August for details. |
| Saturday 17 December | 3:30pm - 6:30pm MCC Manchester Discussion Group - St John Chrysostom's Church S. Manchester Followed by |

our Christmas Meal, probably at Zorba's in Chorlton. See Saturday 20 August for contact details.

2006

Friday 19 to Sunday 21 May - Weekend at Windermere

Friday 15 to Sunday 17 September - Weekend at St Columba's House, Woking

2007

Friday 18 to Sunday 20 May - Weekend at Whaley Hall

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for Pam and Rosie, David in ongoing illness, Toni for family reconciliation, Jane Bowles after surgery, Susie in the throes of moving house, those who await a date for surgery and all whose recovery from surgery or illness has not been all that they have sought or wished for, or who are in pain.

LISTENERS

People who are prepared to listen to others and are happy to be available are listed below. If you need someone to talk to, choose which one and give them a ring: -

Michelle O'Brien 020 8397 2403

Jenny Bond 01623 836662

Jane Bowles 01690 760365

Michelle Le Morvan 01743 341026

Jenny-Anne Bishop 01606 783035

Carol Moore 01625 858487

LEGISLATION - THE GOOD NEWS

My Gender Recognition Certificate has arrived and also my new birth certificate. It feels very good; there is a wonderful sense of completeness. I'm delighted that it is possible and hope that as many of you as wish will be as pleased.

May I remind you that if you qualify under the two year rule, you can apply for a pack in July? If you need any information, give me a call. The Civil Partnerships Act 2004 comes into effect on December 5th, if this is of use to you. As for Identity Cards, this now seems to be a political hot potato and you are advised to follow events as they unfold in the media and say what you want to say to your MP and to the Home Secretary.

- AND THE BAD

Gender Recognition (Disclosure of Information) (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Order 2005

This order, issued by the Department for Constitutional Affairs, came into force on 4th April 2005. There are clauses dealing with disclosure in relation to legal advice, for medical purposes, for credit reference agencies and insolvency. These are relatively innocuous but Clause 4 regarding disclosure for religious purposes is not good news. It is perhaps best to let you see exactly what it says:-

“Disclosure for religious purposes

4. (1) It is not an offence under section 22 of the Act for a person who acquired protected information in an official capacity in relation to an organised religion to disclose that information to any other person acting in such a capacity if the conditions set out in paragraphs (2) and (where applicable) (3) are met.

(2) The first condition is that the disclosure is made for the purpose of enabling any person to make a decision—

- (a) whether to officiate at or permit the marriage of the subject;
- (b) whether the marriage of the subject is valid or should be annulled or dissolved;
- (c) whether to admit or appoint the subject—
 - (i) as a minister of religion.
 - (ii) to any employment, office or post for purposes of an organised religion,
 - (iii) to any religious order or community associated with an organised religion, or
 - (iv) to membership (or any category of membership) of an organised religion;
- (d) whether any admission or appointment mentioned in sub-paragraph (c) is valid or should be suspended, terminated or revoked; or
- (e) whether the subject is eligible to receive or take part in any religious sacrament, ordinance or rite, or take part in any act of worship or prayer, according to the practices of an organised religion.

(3) The second condition is that, if the disclosure is made for the purpose of enabling any person to make a decision of the kind mentioned in paragraph (2)(c), (d) or (e), the person making the disclosure reasonably considers that that person may need the information in order to make a decision which complies with the doctrines of the religion in question or avoids conflicting with the strongly held religious convictions of a significant number of the religion's followers.

(4) It is not an offence under section 22 of the Act for a person who acquired protected information in an official capacity in relation to an organised religion to disclose that information to any person responsible for supervising him in relation to a decision of the kind mentioned in paragraph (2).”

This order, effective from 4th April, may either be downloaded free from the DCA website or bought it from the TSO for £3.

For religious purposes, there are a number of situations where, if someone in an official capacity in a church becomes aware that another person is transsexual (although they hold a GRC), they may disclose that information to other specified people without incurring criminality under the disclosure provisions. The problem is that whilst the disclosure is regulated, it may be so wide that literally everyone in the church may be aware of it, especially in churches that are congregational.

Decisions may then be taken as to the acceptability of the transsexual person, including to “take part in any act of worship or prayer”. The implication is that if you are not acceptable, you may be excluded with no recourse. Quite where this fits in with “Love thy neighbour as thyself” is of course a matter for individual conscience.

After reading this, you may wish to make your views known to the Secretary of State, Department of Constitutional Affairs, Selborne House, 54 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QW.

GARDEN PARTY - JULY 9

This will be held here, at Salmons Lane, and the date will be July 9, which is a change from that given in the last newsletter. I did write to all those I thought might attend to let them know.

The format is as usual. Gather from 3.30 on with tea and buns. About sixish, the Rev'd Martin Kelly will be holding our communion service. Thereafter food and wine into the evening, with plenty of time for chat. Please give me a ring at least a day or two before so that I can cater properly.

WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE - 18-20 NOVEMBER

This should be every bit as good as previous weekends and we are looking forward to it. All the usual Sibyls features. The house is very comfortable, with excellent food. The booking form is at the end of the newsletter. I suggest that you book early - Whaley Hall was sold out, with a waiting list.

Because this weekend is being held in November, when the weather is not at its most cheerful, we are not arranging any excursions but we will have a speaker. The Rev'd Jane Fraser will be joining us on the Saturday morning to lead a discussion on sex and sexuality. What could be more interesting? Peter Middlemiss has kindly provided the contact and she comes highly recommended.

If this is not enough the Rev'd Georgina Everingham will be taking our communion service on the Sunday. I know you will look forward to that.

OASIS MEETING AT PETERSFIELD - FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER AT NOON

These are excellent meetings and June again was good. Marian led an excellent thoughtful communion service and there followed a splendid three course lunch. With six Sibyls there, conversation flowed and as ever was a mixture of the serious, the sad and the funny. It was a great pleasure that Pam and Rosie were able to come and we were delighted to see them. These are good meetings if you can get there on a Friday in the middle of the day.

We are very grateful to Jacky for arranging these and to Jenny for her generous hospitality. The cost is now £10 but if you need any help with this, please talk to me. The next meeting will be held in October, noon on Friday 14th. Please ring Jackie - 01489 878765 - to confirm. Put 3 February 2006 also in your diary.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal at The Gourmet Pizza in comfortable surroundings. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. June was no exception. With four of us gathered together, it was a great time for discussion and exchange of ideas and support. No-one wanted to go home and we broke up late.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, Soho, Dean Street, 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (look for the sign above your head, 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 Church) from 6.30. Next meeting - Thursday August 11. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

SUNDAY COMMUNION - 24 JULY

As an experiment, we will attend the 11 am Sunday communion at St James, Piccadilly. St James has long been known as a bastion of liberalism in the Church of England and it would be good to go there. I, Jay, will wait outside until about 10.55 and gather up those who come and we will attend the service. Afterwards we can make up our minds which restaurant we shall go to for Sunday lunch.

People tell me that they can't make the Thursday meetings for various reasons. Let's experiment and try a Sunday meeting. If it is popular we can make it a regular feature.

WHALEY HALL 13 – 15 MAY 2005

Overall this was a good weekend which everyone enjoyed. There were one or two little hiccups but these have been sorted out for the future. By popular acclaim, we want to go back and we have booked for May 2007.

Elen Heart kindly volunteered to write the account of the weekend, which, together with the account of Sibyls Together, you will find further on in the newsletter.

STRAWBERRY TEA AND DINNER

As I rather feared, this has not been possible to book this year. St. Saviour's Priory was fully booked and we shall have to see what we can do next year.

REGIONAL AND OTHER MEETINGS AND EVENTS

A very big thank you to Jenny-Anne and Elen for organising events in the North-West. As you will see from the diary there are regular services and social events, mostly based around the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Manchester. MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. Jenny-Anne can be contacted on 01606-783035 or by e-mail jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk. The MCC has its own website www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm.

There will be another Bournemouth Fun Weekend from Friday 23 to Sunday 25th September. Details and booking form are at the end of this newsletter.

CHURCH SERVICE - MAY 21 - ORGANISED BY MARK REES

A few of the Sibyls came to this service which overall had some 60/70 people. It was a good celebration of the Gender Recognition Act and Mark must be well pleased. With a buffet lunch afterwards, it was a good opportunity to meet others and I think that everyone enjoyed it.

THE TRANSGENDERED CHRISTIAN

Helen Savage writes - I'm delighted to report that our book seems to be coming together. I'm enormously grateful to everyone who has taken so much time and trouble to write about your own experiences. The sum of them is impressive and moving, and there's already enough to ensure that we'll be able to show an equally rich and moving expression of the diversity of transgendered expressions of faith and hope in life.

Russell Reid had promised a paper but, as you know, he's been under very considerable pressure. The need for the second formal pre-op assessment allowed me the privilege of meeting him for the first time and we've come up with a formula whereby he'll be able to help without him having to spend hours writing. And then Jay came marvelously to the rescue by persuading Bernard and Terry Reed of GIRES to produce a summary of the current scientific understanding of 'atypical gender development'. I've spoken with Bernard and it will, I hope, be something on the lines of the recent paper published on the GIRES website, but with a little more expansion and explanation for those of us who find the (sometimes) necessary terseness of scientific language rather too condensed for comfort. I'm now confident that the background to gender dysphoria will be covered well and with authority.

The theological part of the book is also looking up, and I hope to be able to beef it up further next month when I'll have the opportunity to talk about transgender issues with some likely and lively characters in the mainstream of the theological establishment.

All in all, I'm now feeling pretty confident that we'll have a complete manuscript ready later this year — and then comes the hard bit of preparing indices, proof-reading and so on!

If there's anything you'd like to know more about the book or have any further suggestions for material (it's not too late) — please phone me (0191 266 8782) or e-mail me: helensavage@tiscali.co.uk

THE NEWSLETTER

We do need articles for publication. The news takes a few pages but we need interesting articles, humour, spiritual experience, ideas, controversy, something that you think would be of interest to all the diverse Sibyls who read this newsletter. Please write; we need your input. Ideally on floppy 3½ inch disks in Word or print out in a clear typeface printed with black ink. Anything else defeats the scanner. If you really have to handwrite them, bear in mind that it takes time to type them.

THE UNITED KINGDOM TRANS ALLIANCE - UKTA

The transgender umbrella group, which has adopted the above name, has held another meeting, this time in June at Telford in Shropshire. Michelle Le Morvan kindly attended on our behalf, and has agreed to be our representative at northern meetings. It rather sounds as if much of the meeting was taken with administration arrangements for the future, but fortunately the smaller societies will not be expected to be responsible for this. This is just as well as I don't think that Sibyls have either the time or money for this.

However the intentions are good, with a wish to work together and to use our joint strength for the common good. We shall continue to be supportive.

TALE PIECE(s)

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.

Not one shred of evidence supports the notion that life is serious.

A conscience is what hurts when all of your other parts feel so good.

Middle age is when broadness of the mind and narrowness of the waist often change places.

Experience is a wonderful thing; it enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again.

If you must choose between two evils, pick the one you've never tried before.

A prize-winning boar had to be turned into sausages after showing absolutely no interest in the ladies, a court has heard. Farmer Galen Dobrev, 43, is demanding damages from the breeder who sold him the 220lb boar; he says it was homosexual. "It's a disgrace," says Dobrev, from Shumen, Bulgaria. "All he was interested in was other male pigs."

Obviously no-one told the pig about Leviticus.

Love and Prayers.

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

Susie Withers (Mrs)

A MESSAGE FROM PAM AND ROSIE

We would like to say a really sincere "thank you" to everyone who has been praying for us over the past few weeks. We have both been very conscious of a rather special love and a remarkable sense of peace that has helped us enormously as we have journeyed through some rather difficult times.

We would also like to say a really big "thank you" to all who attended the Whaley Hall weekend for the collection that was taken for Pam. The flowers were absolutely beautiful, and the card signed by so many dear friends will be treasured. We were quite overcome by such generosity and the extra money has been used to purchase some CD's of our favourite music.

Just to bring everyone up-to-date, Pam has now finished the radiotherapy treatment on her head and chest and is much improved as a result - now down to just 8 pills a day! Unfortunately she has lost most of her hair but we are hopeful that it will grow back soon. Her next appointment with the oncologist is in early July so we are hoping for some good news then.

Once again, thank you all for your love and concern - you are all very special people.

SIBYLS TOGETHER AT WHALEY HALL MAY 2005

JAY

1. Jay reminded the Sibyls that Mark Rees was holding his service at St Ann's Soho which we would support where possible. Sibyls intending to go should phone Mark.
2. The Garden Party will be held on July 9 instead of July 2.
3. The weekend was discussed. There were issues about the kitchen, lack of biscuits, the rock band and towels, which would be taken up but these were minor matters. Those present felt that the weekend was good and they would like to come back again. [18 - 20 May 2007 has been booked.]
4. It was agreed that we would go back to St Columba's, Woking, as our choice of a house in the South. Two dates were available but the meeting was overwhelmingly in favour of 15 - 17 September 2006. [This has been booked.]
5. Jay would like to see more smaller meetings. Jenny-Anne would supply dates of her meetings at MCC so that Susie could put them in the newsletter. Jay was toying with the idea of meeting at a Central London church to share in their Sunday morning communion service and then go to lunch in a nearby restaurant.
6. Jay said that she was getting older, slower, more tired. There was no way that she would go on for ever and new blood was needed. She outlined a convenor system whereby someone would take responsibility for a weekend. Michelle O'Brien immediately volunteered to take over the St Columba's meeting and Jenny-Anne said that she would see what the girls in the North West could do.
7. Jay had arranged a speaker for Holland House and suggested that it would be a good idea to have one for St Columba's. It was agreed that Terry and Bernard Reed of GIRES would be a very good choice.
8. A collection was being taken for flowers for Rosie and Pam, which Stephanie Shepherd would look after. (Rosie and Pam thanked all very much for the love, thoughts and prayers. A photo of the flowers has been posted on the Sibyls E-group).
9. Jenny-Anne and Elen were organising another weekend at Bournemouth which would be publicised.
10. Jay thanked everyone who had attended the weekend, Carol for arranging offices, those who had taken the offices, Susie, Michelle O'Brien, Carol and Michelle Le Morvan, Jenny-Anne for running the entertainment, and everyone for helping and contributing.

WEEKEND AT WHALEY BRIDGE 13 - 15 MAY 2005

ELEN HEART

I felt quite smug as the car in which I was travelling with Jenny-Anne and Susie approached Whaley Bridge. True, I had never been to Whaley Hall before - nor even to Whaley Bridge for that matter - but I felt distinctly like a seasoned Sibyl. After all, I had been once before - to Windermere last year - and I knew the ropes. I was no longer the new girl, that privilege shared by Anna, Jackie, Janice and Stephanie.

Jackie made quite an entrance by telephoning a distress call during Friday dinner; she had suffered a mishap on the road to Whaley Bridge and needed assistance.

Jenny-Anne and I swiftly rode to the rescue (me in my strappy stiletto sandals!) and brought Jackie - if not her car - safely back to the Hall.

After dinner Michelle Le Morvan introduced us to meditation, explaining different techniques and its value in today's hectic society. We had a chance to try it for ourselves, which I found quite difficult; when I managed to prevent my wayward consciousness wandering off into typically feminine byways and focused upon my steady breathing I caught myself nodding off!

Susie's Night Office introduced the theological theme for the weekend: Mary Magdalene. As a controversial figure representing the ambivalent role of women in the early Christian church, she was a suitable subject of contemplation for trans women; our relations with today's religious authorities are equally uncertain. Discussion upon the topic continued afterwards in the main lounge, while a smaller group retired to the conservatory to debate everything from transgenderism to tractors!

We learned more about Mary Magdalene - or, at least, how she has been perceived through the centuries - in Michelle O'Brien's Morning Office on Saturday. Michelle covered a great deal of ground - both historically and theologically - from the early Gnostics by way of the Cathars and Leonardo Da Vinci's "Last Supper" to the controversy surrounding Rennes-le-Château and "The Last Temptation of Christ"; I found it both intellectually stimulating and spiritually provoking (anyone who remembers my talk on the Holy Shroud at Windermere last year will know of my fascination for religious enigmas).

After coffee we collected our packed lunches and set off on our excursions. Most of the company went off on the 'de rigueur' mini-bus tour, [*It's optional! Honest! - Ed*] while a few remained at Whaley Bridge to enjoy the May sunshine in the delightful surrounds of the Hall. I went with Jenny-Anne, Anna and Lesley (or should that be Leslie as he went in male mode?) to visit the nearby Peak Rail for a steam hauled journey from Rowsley to Matlock and back. I am beginning to think that some of the pilgrims to Sibyls view the weekends as opportunities to find God and the nearest steam railway!

We ate our packed lunch on the train and just had time to finish it before we reached our destination and briefly stretched our legs on the station platform before boarding the train for the return trip; Peak Rail is not the longest preserved line in the country! Once back at Rowsley we wandered around the sidings looking at the collections of rolling stock and acquired diesel locos before visiting the local water mill, a fascinating survival from the time of the Industrial Revolution, with equally fascinating craft shops. Jenny-Anne and I spent quite a while in one - and came out with some lovely silver rings - while Anna did her own thing and took a tour of the mill. Afterwards we gravitated to the tea shop for afternoon tea and coffee, where Anna again demonstrated her independence by eschewing all dietary restraint and consuming a large segment of extremely fattening gateaux!

Susie The mini-bus trippers wended our way through Buxton and on towards Ashbourne. We stopped at Ilam, near Ilam Park— where one wag was heard to ask, "What does it do for the rest of the day?" (11 am Park? Oh, never mind!) - and some of us explored the YHA. Ilam has the honour of hosting the confluence of Rivers Dove and Manifold; I understand that Izaak Walton of 'Compleat Angler' fame did much of his 'research' here. Jay did some serious 'chilling out', which involved sitting on the hump-back bridge over the River Dove and watching the water meander gently underneath. What a sensible

idea. Carol bravely led me up a hillside where we were presented with superb views of the surrounding countryside (and sheep!). We then moved on to a car park adjacent to the river in Dovedale where we found what must be the cheapest ice cream in England. There were delightful walks either side of the river and our intrepid Carol managed to scale Thorpe Cloud. In all, a lovely time.

Elen again

On returning to the Hall we began our preparations for dinner, an opportunity to dress up in our best evening gowns. The meal would be followed by the traditional Sibyls entertainment, and knowing what to expect from my previous visit I had prepared a little song. I did not intend to stand up on my own, however, and had inveigled Jenny-Anne and Jackie into performing it with me, though they needed quite a bit of haranguing before they were anything like word perfect! (*A somewhat less reverent, more transgendered version of 'There is Nothing like a Dame' than the original – Ed*)

The evening's performance began with a game, organised by Carol, which involved much jumping up and down and running around the room. After that we all did our turns, and apart from my girlie offering with Jenny-Anne and Jackie, there was rhythmic drumming from Lesley and rhythmic shimmying from Jay, doing her belly dance with wispy veil and scimitar (I'm sure she has a groove in her head to keep the latter in place!). We had amusing stories from Suzanne and Jayne, and a psalm from Stephanie, while Anna gave us her best Northern accent in a Stanley Holloway monologue. Susan, Janet Watson, Michelle Le Morvan and Susie all read poems, Susie including one specially provided for the occasion by Pam. It was during Susie's performance that the show was brought to a halt by Carol and Janice who collapsed into uncontrolled giggling at the image of a one-legged horse going 'clip'!

I thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment - both as participant and audience - but Janet Marcia clearly was not so impressed; she slept through the whole proceedings! Before we all went off to sleep that night, Carol's Night Office offered profound contemplations upon the writings of Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary General of the United Nations.

On Sunday morning we welcomed Catharine and Peter as day visitors. Michelle Le Morvan's Morning Office returned to the theme of Mary Magdalene in the context of the first Christians and faith based upon relationships. There was about it something of the atmosphere that I feel must have imbued those early church meetings as we discussed and interpreted Christ's words without reference to all the rules, hierarchy and ritual that have accrued since.

Sibyls Together followed, after which we had coffee and the Communion Service (seeming to me a little too formal in contrast with Michelle's earlier gathering, though I very much enjoyed the 'group hug'). Then we all gathered in the sun outside the front door for the group photographs, our final act of togetherness before lunch and dispersal to our different ways.

What did I take away from my second Sibyls weekend? I cannot help comparing it to last year's at Windermere, and although Whaley Hall has a beautiful setting, in terms of facilities - especially catering - it fell far short in my estimation. On the other hand I feel that the special inclusive atmosphere that Sibyls manages to generate was, for me, even stronger and more embracing than before, and that - when all is said and done - is the heart of Sibyls. I found it a wonderful social and spiritual communion of transgendered sisters (and Peter!).



SOME THOUGHTS ON MARY MAGDALENE

MICHELLE O'BRIEN

"From a Soul Somewhere Between Orthodoxy and Heresy"

Throughout the life of the church there have been different understandings, interpretations and identifications surrounding the Magdalene. She has been identified as the penitent sinner, the woman taken in adultery, Mary (Martha's sister) who favoured the contemplative life, she who anointed Jesus with perfumed oil from an alabaster jar, who wiped her tears from his feet with her hair. She was the faithful one, among the first to visit Jesus' tomb to anoint His body, remaining despite his absence, and the first witness to the resurrection.

She can also be pointed to in support for women's ministry as being present at the earliest times, and endorsed by Jesus. Perhaps subsequent revision of the Gospel narratives by those who could not countenance this has hidden her role as disciple and led to the exclusion of a strong woman from the ranks of the apostles, men preferring a sanitised whore become faithful woman.

Song of Songs 3:1-4

The bride says this:

On my bed, at night, I sought him
Whom my heart loves.
I sought but did not find him.
So I will rise and go through the city;
In the streets and the squares
I will seek him whom my heart loves.
I sought but did not find him.
The watchmen came upon me

On their rounds in the City:
'Have you seen him whom my heart loves?'
Scarcely had I passed them
Than I found him whom my heart loves.

From the 11th Century gypsies in the Rhone valley believed that Mary fled Palestine shortly after Jesus' disappearance, along with Martha and Lazarus. They landed at Marseilles, and from there preached the Gospel in the pagan Roman province of the Narbonne. The Gnostics honoured women as equals to men, and female figures play central roles; they believed that Mary was the foremost amongst the Apostles, even above Peter, in fidelity, understanding and closeness to Jesus. Within the Gnostic Gospels, and in John (the most gnostic of the canonical Gospels), she is given a special place. There are those who assert that John's Gospel was actually Mary's Gospel, her being the "beloved disciple" – and masculinised by a later editor. Certainly, if she is the woman who anointed Jesus, and dried away her tears with her hair, she would have been very close to him – or have been breaking the religious taboos of her time.

Just as the orthodox played down her significance, and the apparent parity between the sexes, so those branded as heretics have tended to identify with her. The Cathars valued the Gospel of John above the others precisely because of its gnostic elements; they also claimed a leadership based on a line of apostolic succession that stretched back to Mary Magdalen and the twelve apostles. It was the soil of the Cathar stories, fused with legends about the Templars, that fed the myths of Rennes-le-Château, the secret society of da Vinci, Poussin, Debussy and Newton which emerged twenty years ago – that Jesus had married Mary Magdalene, and was the founder of a royal dynasty here on earth.

Psalm 62:2-6, 8-9

O God, you are my God, for you I long;
For you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
Like a dry, weary land without water
So I gaze on you in the sanctuary
To see your strength and your glory.
For your love is better than life,
My lips will speak your praise.

So I will bless you all my life,
In your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
My mouth shall praise you with joy.

For you have been my help;
In the shadow of your wings I rejoice.
My soul clings to you;
Your right hand holds me fast.

(suggested reading, John 20:1-2, 11-18)

Gregory the Great

When Mary Magdalen came to the tomb and did not find the Lord's body, she thought it had been taken away and so informed the disciples. After they came and saw the tomb, they too believed what Mary had told them. The text then says: "The disciples went back home," and it adds: "but Mary wept and remained standing outside the tomb."

We should reflect on Mary's attitude and the great love she felt for Christ; for though the disciples had left the tomb, she remained. She was still seeking the one she had not found, and while she sought she wept; burning with the fire of love, she longed for him who she thought had been taken away. And so it happened that the woman who stayed behind to seek Christ was the only one to see him. For perseverance is essential to any good deed, as the voice of truth tell us: "Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved."

The Beguines

These were a religious group of women mainly. They established religious communities across North-western Europe in the 13th Centuries, and which despite early persecution survived into the 19th Century, many houses being absorbed into more traditional religious orders. The Magdalene was a favourite amongst Beguine writers, who believed she was Mary, the sister of Martha, the woman taken in adultery, and the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. These writings were from Marguerite Porete's, "the Mirror of Simple Souls". Marguerite was burned at the stake as a relapsed heretic in 1310; this work survived anonymously or under male pseudonyms until 1946. The Beguines came under the jurisdiction of Meister Eckhart, successor to Thomas Aquinas, and influenced his own writings prior to his being silenced by the church authorities himself.

Chapter 76: "Here one shows by the example of the Magdalene and the saints that the Soul has no shame about her sins."

Ah, for the sake of God, behold the repentant sinner. She had no dishonour because of what Jesus Christ said to her, that she had chosen the better part and the most sure, and , what is greater, that it would never be taken from her. And also she had no dishonour from the fact that her sins might be made known before all people, through the witness of the Gospel itself, which says, in the hearing of all, that God delivered seven enemies from her. She had dishonour from no one, except those by whom she had been condemned. For she was overtaken, captured, and filled, and so she concerned herself with no one except Him.

Chapter 124: "The second consideration is about the Magdalene."

I considered Mary, how she cultivated the earth of her Lord which He had left to her. For she sowed wheat there, without mingling anything, wheat which was joined to this tilled earth, and afterward her master made this bear fruit one hundredfold. But this was not until Mary had done what she could and had to do. And when she had done what she could and what she had to do for God who demanded this of her, and who for this had created her of Himself, and God accomplishes His part gently in Mary, for Mary, without Mary. For Mary had done her part and she held on to nothing more except the Master who had given her such earth to till.

Since she had done what she had to do, she left the rest completely up to God's good pleasure in her when she had accomplished what was in her. Likewise ought we to do. But how her labour and tilling profitted in her, and how Mary possessed this life from which she possessed fruit one hundred-fold through great multiplication, this no one knows but God who alone accomplishes this multiplication. Such working He accomplished in Mary in the desert, of Mary when Mary rested from herself, not when she sought after Him of herself, but when the divine goodness reposed in Mary. And this goodness rests Mary from herself, without Mary, for Mary's sake.

Then Mary lived from new fruit which came by the work of God alone. Thus she accomplished the labour and undertook the tilling and sowing, but not the fruit. Mary thus attained the course of her being not when she was speaking and seeking, but when she was silent and at rest.

Much about Mary Magdalene is a mystery, but it is clear she was a faithful follower of Jesus, closely related to Him, having responded to His call, someone who was recorded for all time as being an important part of what happened in the Gospel story.

Almighty God,
Whose Son restored Mary Magdalene to health of mind and body
And called her to be a witness to his resurrection:
Forgive us and heal us by your grace,
That we may serve you in the power of his risen life;
Who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen.

I will acknowledge that non-original material has been gathered from the Daily Missal (R.C.), Celebrating Common Prayer (CofE), Ellen L. Babinsky's translation of Porete's "The Mirror of Simple Souls"; information comes from Joanne Maguire Robinson's "Nobility and Annihilation in The Mirror of Simple Souls", memory, Baigent & Leigh's "The Holy Blood & the Holy Grail" etc., and the internet. I haven't read the DaVinci Code, so can't refer to it. Further details of texts cited can be made available on request. Umberto Eco's "Foucault's Pendulum" was the last word in Millenarian conspiracy theories following Wilson & O'Shea's "The Illuminatus Trilogy", but I guess people either didn't read it or didn't get the joke. Norman Cohn's "The Pursuit of the Millennium" (1957) is an excellent, but scary, book on how wrong/mad we Christians can get things at times.

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COFFEE

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning. The wife said, "You should do it, because you get up first; then we wouldn't have to wait so long for our coffee." The husband said, "You are in charge of cooking around here so you should do it, it is your job and I can wait for my coffee." The wife said, "No, you should do it and, anyway, it says so in the Bible." The husband scoffed, "I can't believe that, show me!" So the wife brought the Bible and showed her husband a number of pages at the top of which it does indeed say –

"HEBREWS."

UNIQUE/MCC FUN WEEKEND AT BOURNEMOUTH: 23 - 25 September 2005

Elen of Unique and Jenny-Anne of MCC Manchester Trans Group invite you to another of their popular fun weekends at Hamilton Hall in Bournemouth.

The Hall is very close to Bournemouth town centre and has a very tranquil and calm atmosphere where you can have a peaceful and stress-free weekend, just being yourself, or it can provide a restful base for more energetic excursions. A visit to the local TG-friendly Metropolitan Community Church on Sunday morning has become a regular feature of our Bournemouth weekends, but the emphasis will be on relaxation and fun.

There is much to do in and around Bournemouth, and group outings can easily be arranged. These could include trips to Brownsea Island nature reserve, Corfe Castle, the Swanage Railway, shopping, swimming etc., though on previous weekends most people just did their own thing.

Hamilton Hall has six en-suite rooms, but will sleep up to 12 with people sharing rooms (10 guests is an optimum number). Hire of The Hall is £900.00 for the weekend, full board, irrespective of the number of guests (we have exclusive use of the Hall from Friday 2:00pm until Sunday 4:00pm approx.). For 10 guests the cost will be £90.00 per person, while for 8 guests (the required minimum) the cost will be £112.50 per person.

The Hall has plenty of space and can accommodate day visitors in addition to guests. Advance booking for meals will be required for day attendance.

Reservations will be on a first come, first served basis, and if you are prepared to share one of the larger rooms so much the better. If you have any questions or suggestions please call Elen on 01745 337144 or Jenny-Anne on 07768-738416 or e-mail elen.heart@btopenworld.com

If you would like to come with us to Bournemouth in September, please complete and return the form below, together with £50.00 per person deposit (cheques made payable to Hamilton Hall). The maximum cost per person will be £112.50 and your booking a place indicates acceptance of this condition (if we receive less than eight bookings the weekend will be cancelled and your deposit will be returned).

Please send the form and cheque to: Ms Elen Heart, 12 Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

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I/We would like to book for Hamilton Hall for the weekend of 23rd – 25th September 2005 and enclose deposit of £50.00 per person by cheque made payable to Hamilton Hall. I/We understand that, assuming a minimum of 8 people, the cost per person for full board will be £112.50 (cost will vary downwards with a higher number of bookings).

NUMBER OF PEOPLE BOOKING: _____

NAME/S FOR BOOKING PURPOSES: _____

ROOM PREFERENCE: Double ☐; Single ☐; Twin ☐ (if Single, are you prepared to share: Y ☐; N ☐)

ANY SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS (e.g. vegetarian): _____

CONTACT NAME & ADDRESS (this will be known only to Elen, not to the Hall staff or anyone else):

CONTACT TELEPHONE: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group
For the Transgendered

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey CR3 0AN

☎ 020 8763 0146

WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE

18 - 20 NOVEMBER 2005

Name.....

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room

Address
(not needed if as per your address label)

.....

.....

Phone No.

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch £108.00

24 hour overnight – afternoon to lunch £54.00

For any variation on the above, please

ask for a quote

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