



THE SIBYLS

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

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey
CR3 0AN

NEWSLETTER 38

June 2006

020 8763 0146

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Regular Meetings

London usually the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by meal at the Gourmet Pizza, Swallow Street, off Piccadilly, London. Next dates August 10th, October 12th.

Manchester every third Saturday of the month at MCC. For details contact Jenny-Anne 01606 783035, jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk or go to www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm

Petersfield Oasis Group every four months on Friday at 12 Noon - ring Jackie 01489 878765. Next date October 27th.

Weekends

2006

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

2007

Friday 18 to Sunday 20 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

Friday 14 to Sunday 16 September - Holland House, Worcestershire

2008

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May - Windermere

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for Rosie and her family, David in ongoing illness, Michelle Le Morvan after surgery, Susie's friend Alan and his various medical problems, 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

The listening system works. There are a number of Sibyls who use this service. If you want someone to talk it over with, why not give it a try?

PAM, REST IN PEACE

We are deeply sorry that Pam lost her battle with cancer. She died peacefully at home, surrounded by her family. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Rosie and her family. Our prayers are with them.

Her passing is a huge loss, both to her family and to us. Her thoughtfulness and consideration for others always shone through. If there was someone feeling a little lonely or perhaps neglected, Pam was there with encouragement and love. She always found her way to anyone who needed help and good cheer. Her infectious smile was never far away.

Perhaps my happiest memory of her is when Rosie and she first came to Whaley Hall. For the entertainment, they danced the rumba together and that was pure joy. The love and thought and rhythm and delight in the dance shone through, and it was marvellous to watch.

Pam, you will be greatly missed. May your smile shine on. Bless you, you loved the Sibyls and we all loved you.

GENDER RECOGNITION ACT

Recently I had cause to write to the GRP. They replied on 25 April with the following information. They have received 1,437 applications for Gender Recognition Certificates. 1,253 full certificates have been granted and 34 interim. 28 applicants have been refused, 21 have withdrawn, and 101 were then in the pipeline.

MEMBERSHIP - VERY IMPORTANT

An awful lot of people, some very astonishing, didn't respond to the request to let us know that they wish to continue receiving the newsletters. Perhaps they don't want them any more, perhaps it has slipped their memory, perhaps they don't read the newsletters or perhaps they assume that it isn't really happening.

If you haven't already sent your slip back or have not otherwise confirmed with me, you will find another pink slip enclosed with this newsletter. Please complete this and return it to me, Jay. If you don't, you will convince me that you don't want to continue in membership and will find that your name has been deleted from the membership list. Don't just assume it's OK; send in your slip!

THE BEGGING BOWL

Thank you to all those members who have responded to the rattle of the begging bowl. Your generosity is greatly appreciated and it makes all the difference to our ability to continue being there. Thank you.

A PERSONAL NOTE

One Sibyl sent back an indignant pink slip saying that I hadn't responded to the cheque that they had sent a few months before and they didn't want anything to do with a group that could behave so badly. This is very understandable except for the fact that I did

reply. Unfortunately due to a computer glitch, entirely my fault, it went astray in the post.

Please be very clear. I always acknowledge donations to the Sibyls. It might be by telephone if I am speaking to you, but more usually by letter. My mother brought me up always to say "thank you" and she was right. If for any reason you haven't heard from me, please don't take offence but do get in touch. There is no way that any donation will go without a thank you. Mistakes happen, discourtesy is never intended.

RUSSELL REID - AN APPEAL

Thank you to those Sibyls who wrote on behalf of Russell. There can't be too many letters and, if you haven't written on his behalf and would like to, please do. There is no further news and the case is still expected to come up in October, and will probably take several weeks.

GARDEN PARTY - SATURDAY 1 JULY

Think lovely cool summer dresses. Think wide shady hats. Arrive from 3 o'clock onwards for buns and tea in the garden (pray for fine weather) with a communion service, hopefully under the cherry tree, about sixish and then an evening of food, wine and good chat. Think soon and then please give me a ring, 020 8763 0146, so that I have an idea of numbers.

WEEKEND AT WINDERMERE - FRIDAY 19 TO SUNDAY 21 MAY

This was super. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves and it was pure pleasure. I am grateful to Elen and Jenny-Anne for organising it, and it was a great success. We are also very grateful to Jasmine: her very full account of the weekend appears later in this newsletter. Now for St Columba's in September.

WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S HOUSE WOKING - FRIDAY 15 TO SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

This is the last newsletter that will be sent out before this weekend, and therefore the last time you will be sent a booking form for it. The big attraction for this weekend is Terry and Bernard Reed of GIRES who will be coming to talk to us on the Saturday. Their talks and explanations are clearly presented and very interesting. They will be telling you of the latest research and I am sure that there will be much to learn. No-one has worked harder for the transsexual cause than Terry and Bernard; they have been zealous in researching the causes of transsexualism and finding ways for people to be helped towards a solution that suits the individual.

All the usual features will be there for the weekend and St Columba's will be pleased to welcome us back again. For all those living in the South East or in or near London and have complained that other weekends are too far away, this is your opportunity. Come and enjoy. Michelle O'Brien will be in charge of arrangements and a booking form is attached.

Please get your booking in early - we haven't had a weekend in the South East for quite a while, and Terry and Bernard should be quite a draw.

THE FUTURE OF THE WEEKENDS

I should tell you of discussions that have been ongoing. By mid-April I was very worried as we only had eleven bookings for the Windermere weekend. That was remarkably few and worrying in the light of our experience at Holland House where we did not have enough people, probably due to the November date.

In one sense numbers don't matter. It is of no consequence if Sibyls has six, sixty or six hundred members. Love and support is our aim, not magnitude. However numbers do matter where we take a house for the weekend. The house needs the revenue to pay their bills and if we don't provide enough of it, we won't be very welcome. So I was worried and took the matter to the committee.

The feedback that I got was that the weekends were a good thing and we should continue. The concrete idea that emerged was that we should concentrate on the spirituality aspect, which is what we are all about and distinguishes us from all other transgender groups. Also it was important that we should continue to provide opportunities for Sibyls to meet so that they can make and grow friendships.

I talked to the various houses and our programme will go ahead, although Holland House in September 2007 has yet to be reviewed. The programme is safe, and in the event we had 24 bookings for Windermere which was more than adequate.

Jenny-Anne's and Peter's questionnaire is designed to let us know what you feel you want out of Sibyls. It is included with this Newsletter - please complete and return it. If you completed one at Windermere please don't send in another one.

SPIRITUALITY

It is important that we concentrate on this. The weekends always aim to include plenty of space for services, offices and reflection; this matters. I also would like more articles written for the newsletter so that you have plenty of food for thought.

The Sibyls is there for people of all denominations and of none. Views will be expressed of which you will disapprove and others that you will find OK. Sibyls is a forum where people are encouraged to look at ideas and ways of doing religion. Transgenderism causes you to look at most aspects of your life and this includes spirituality. So we try to provide a variety of ideas and of services. Those that you don't like will encourage you to think why not and what is important to you, and those that you do like you will find supportive. We are not trying to make everything comfortable, but it must be a safe space to explore. On an editorial note, please understand that I will write things that express my point of view which you may not like, but that doesn't mean I suppress views with which I disagree. *Au contraire*, you write and I'll publish.

Sibyls is not a church but it is very much church.

OASIS MEETING AT PETERSFIELD

These are excellent meetings. There is always a thoughtful and quiet communion service, an excellent lingering lunch and plenty of time to talk and to be. These are good meetings if you can get there on a Friday in the middle of the day.

We are very grateful to Jackie for arranging these and to Jenny for her generous hospitality. The cost is £10 but if you need any help with this, please talk to me. The next meeting will be held on Friday 27 October 2006, at noon. Please ring Jackie - 01489 878765 - to confirm.

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 and a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. Few come but those that do find it very worthwhile.

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 The Gourmet Pizza, Swallow Street (off Piccadilly and opposite St James's Church.) Next meeting - Thursday 10 August. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

MANCHESTER MEETINGS

Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West. There is a regular monthly meeting, third Saturday, at 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 .

THE NEWSLETTER

As outlined above, we need articles - please write. We need interesting articles, humour, spiritual experience, ideas, controversy; something that you think would be of interest. Items can be sent by e-mail to Susie.withers@virgin.net, on floppy 3½ inch disk to Jay (in Word, please) or print out in a clear typeface printed with black ink. Anything else defeats the scanner.

THE UNITED KINGDOM TRANS ALLIANCE - UKTA

Sadly we didn't have representation at the meeting at Redditch, mainly because we didn't know it was happening. There were only about four or five present. It urgently needs to find a focus and some administration.

BARGAIN OF THE WEEK

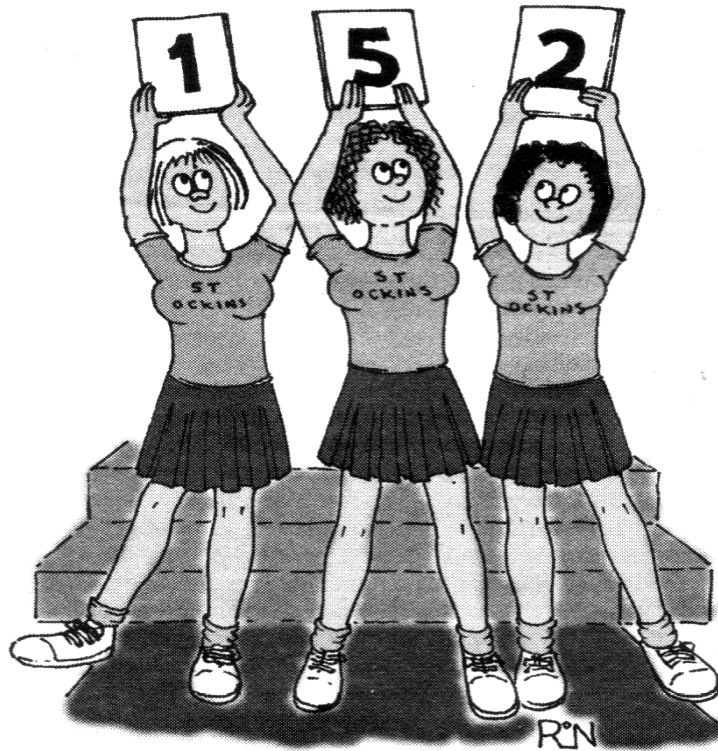
A Chinese man has been banned from selling his soul in an on-line auction. The Taobao auction site received 58 bids for the soul before it called a halt to the sale. A spokesman for the company said that Taobao wasn't opposed to the idea of selling souls online, but wanted more proof that the seller could provide the goods. "After some discussion, we decided that we will allow the member to sell his soul on Taobao, but only if he can provide written permission from a higher authority."

Love and Prayers.

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

Susie Withers (Mrs)

St Gargoyles



Jim was in no hurry to mend the hymn board

UNITARIANISM

David Usher sets out where Unitarians stand on values, beliefs, and being Christian in this article, which first appeared in The Church Times on 24 March 2006, and has given us permission to reproduce the article. The Rev'd Dr David Usher is a Unitarian Minister in Sevenoaks, Kent, and is in charge of three other congregations in the south-east.

'We don't tell people what they should or must believe'

UNITARIANS have been in the news after the decision by Chester Cathedral to disallow us from holding our anniversary service there (News, 3 March; Letters, 10 March). The basis for this ruling was that we do not subscribe to a Trinitarian doctrine about Jesus, and therefore are not Christian. Yet we have held our anniversary service in the Cathedral three times already, and the Anglican clergy who were present praised enthusiastically the content, style and spirit of our worship.

Our name comes from the rejection by our forebears of the doctrine of the Trinity. They understood themselves as firmly within the Christian tradition, wanting not to abandon Christianity, but to have its doctrines based on accurate scriptural scholarship. Had the very human vote at Nicaea in 325 gone the other way, as well it might, who knows what Christianity might have looked like today. But Unitarians have moved on from centuries-old doctrinal disputes. We don't get excited today about the Trinity. It is time the Church of England moved on as well.

What is distinctive about Unitarians today is that we are non-credal. We don't tell people what they should or must believe. We tell them that what they believe is a matter for the discernment of their own reason, conscience, and experience, and that

we are united not by conformity of belief, but by shared principles and values. Those shared values include the worth and dignity of all people — *all*. Because of that value, we were the first denomination to welcome women into our ministry, and have long since welcomed lesbians and gay people into our congregations and ministry. It amazes and saddens us that the Anglican Communion continues to provide sanctuary to so many misogynists and homophobes who hide behind what we see as spurious theological claims.

The same shared value demands that we engage in respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree theologically. We do not think we have the truth. At best, we have a truth. When we are talking about matters of faith, Unitarians do not insist that only they are right and others are wrong. Humility is an essential religious value. Another principle that unites us is the conviction that faith is fluid, a journey and not a destination — and subject to constant revision in the light of new evidence and experience. Because we welcome new revelation as the tool of intelligent faith, we were the one denomination not destabilised by Darwin's theory of evolution. This was not just because he was a Unitarian himself, but because science and rational enquiry are the handmaidens of religious faith.

That is also why we incorporate the wisdom and insights from a wide variety of sources: poetry, philosophy, and the great teachers of all traditions. For us, something is scripture because it is true, rather than being true because it is in scripture. A third shared value is community. We are not individuals on an idiosyncratic personal quest. We believe in the importance of religious community within which each person participates. Such a community helps to correct wayward thinking, but, more importantly, it offers human contact and context. We worship together, we work to make the world a better place together, we comfort, and we celebrate together. Of course, Unitarians are not unique in this respect.

ARE UNITARIANS Christians? How narrowly do you want to define that term? If a Christian is someone who agrees only with everything that one particular Church has laid down as universally applicable doctrine, then we aren't, and don't want to be. We are glad to be heretics — people who choose for themselves. On that basis, though, Anglicans aren't Christians either, because the Roman Catholic Church was here first, and you don't agree with everything it says. You don't even all agree with everything your own Church says. Article XXXVII insists that Anglicans endorse capital punishment, but there are many who do not subscribe to that. Will the cathedral kick them out, too, for not being sufficiently pure?

Think about the origins of the Church of England in Henry VIII's dubious manoeuvrings — hardly a sound theological foundation for a Church, or one that lends much authority from which to pronounce on the sexual behaviour of people today. At least we Unitarians can claim a legitimate theological *raison d'être*.

Christianity, in its broadest sense, needs to learn how dangerous it is to draw strict lines between those who disagree theologically. It needs to learn from the example of Jesus that we are to be governed in our spiritual lives by the law of love, not by the love of law. It is ironic that many liberal Anglicans profess themselves more in sympathy with Unitarianism, theologically and socially, than with some of their rigidly conservative fellow communicants.

Unitarians believe that, in a diverse and divided world, ticking the right boxes on a doctrinal questionnaire is irrelevant, compared with trying to live faithful, loving lives. Some Unitarians do that explicitly in the spirit of Jesus, and others include Jesus in a wider pantheon of great religious teachers. But, whatever our personal theologies, all

Unitarians believe that if there is salvation, it will be according to our deeds, not our creeds. The chorus of angels will be singing their praises in glorious harmony, not unison.

SCIENCE AND OPIUM

Carol Nixon

It is a matter for admiration that Sandra Moore writes so regularly for the Newsletter, so I regret being moved to take issue with her, regarding her article in Issue 37.

It is her views on what is called "Science" that disappoint and alarm me. Unless one distinguishes carefully between science and what is called science, one may be guilty of shooting the messenger because one doesn't like the message. One may also be behaving in a parallel way to concluding, say, from the intolerant behaviour of some so-called Christians, that Christianity is a religion of intolerance. Unfortunately, Sandra does not make those necessary distinctions.

Thus she *appears* to say that 'Science' is dogmatic and alien to true investigative open-mindedness. Some scientists may be, but if they are, they are extremely bad scientists; for the crucial characteristic of the scientific method is disciplined scepticism. No theory in any of the sciences is ever 100% proven. The most famous example of this is the Theory of Gravity. Newton developed it to explain and predict the behaviour of physical systems. For centuries it worked, and accordingly, many imagined that there was an end to it. But by the early 20th.Century, information was available about the physical world, in particular the measured speed of light, which did not completely accord with the predictions of Newton's theory, and it was from that dissonance that the Theory of Relativity was born. Even then, Einstein did not imagine that he had got 'the answer, and worked for the rest of his life to harmonise his theory with other observed phenomena.

Of course peoples' self-esteem does get tangled up in maintaining the truth of this or that theory, and the ongoing debate in the field of micro-biology between extreme genetic determinists like Richard Dawkins, those who argue for a role for chance factors like Steven Rose, and those who are trying to create a picture that allows, to put it over-simply, for the possibility of a creative God, like Simon Conway Morris. keeps on throwing up ignoble examples of personal vendettas. But these are all within the scientific mould of thought, and the relative worth of the different theories will be determined in the end by how closely they describe the observed reality, and how powerful they prove as predictive instruments, not by their moral consequences, nor by the celebrity of their authors. In the end, the scientist is servant to the truth. (I have deliberately refrained from writing 'Truth', with a capital letter, as I hope to explain.)

It is a total misunderstanding of the scientific method to blame the BSE fiasco on scientists. Science can ONLY speak when it has evidence. In the lack of evidence either way, all the scientist can do is to say that there is no evidence, which is essentially what happened at first in relation to the possibility or not of contracting variant-CJD from BSE-infected cattle. It would have been dishonourable to do otherwise. When the crisis hit, research intensified considerably, because funding became available, and some relevant evidence was found too late. But scientists are individual human beings who are normally only following up one particular interest at any one time. It is unreasonable to expect researchers to concentrate on an issue which is of public concern, if the public (i.e. the Government) does not signal to them by providing research funding that the issue is of concern. And as for deciding what to do in such a case, it is for others, more closely involved with policy decisions, to make judgments, based on probabilities provided by what evidence there is. They should always err on the side of safety. Unfortunately, the commercial considerations which

have such a huge influence upon policy judgments usually run diametrically counter to the precautionary principle, of not taking unquantifiable risks with people's health - and it was those considerations which led to the fiasco. To shift the blame from economics/politics to science may be a convenient scapegoat, but it is unworthy. It is worth noting that some scientists have been warning of environmental catastrophe, with increasing assurance and in increasing detail, since the 1950's - but who took any notice of those voices, however 'scientific'?

Science does not give us values, nor does it tell us how to live, nor what the purpose of our lives should be. It leaves out of consideration, for the most part, love, spirit, religion. But science practised with integrity is nevertheless an expression of some of the highest ideals of the human mind - unquenchable curiosity, disciplined thought, honesty and humility, usually combined with wonder at the majesty and complexity of the Universe.

The first stone axes cut down trees and split open the heads of enemies. What is different about the modern weapons of horror? They are all derived from abstract research in the first place, much of which has also brought benefits to mankind. Perhaps we face as a species a modern version of the dilemma facing Adam and Eve. Should we pursue knowledge or not?

I have no doubts myself that, apart from feelings, the scientific paradigm is the only way in which we can safely say that we "know". I will be attacked, if anyone can be bothered (!), as a reductionist, anti-religious, etc., etc. Not a bit of it. Certainly I can know in other ways, by being told by respected people, by reading books, including the Bible (or the Koran, etc.), or the Internet, and through direct experience. I happen to have had some very strong direct (mystical?) experience of what seemed to be the Spirit, which is why I am in the Sibyls - but I do not derive from that any idea that I 'know the Truth'. For everything which I "know" by these means is checked against the scepticism test, which scientists apply as a matter of course. Is there an alternative explanation? How did the speaker or writer come by this piece of information or instruction? Has it been conveyed accurately? Did my subconscious invent it? There is never absolute certainty, although to be consistent I have to say that I cannot be sure of that! This is what I mean by the Truth - the passionate search for what can never be certain. (In the meantime, the discipline of the search itself, and what we find and who we meet on the way, help to direct our lives into worthwhile paths, and with luck, moderate our selfishness and stupidity.) The scientific habit of thought is vital as a check upon false claims, delusion and old wives' tales. If we react away from it because of what the editor suggested might be a perceived 'idolatry' of science, we return to the Dark Ages, where every self-proclaimed seer could be sure of believers. Surely we cannot agree with the Evangelical Alliance that God's Word takes precedence over scientific accuracy. What we *must* do is use our sense of values to ensure that the results of enquiry are rightly used - and indeed, perhaps to try to prevent some sorts of enquiry, the applied research which leads to armaments, perhaps foetus research, perhaps animal research, perhaps genetic modification, perhaps research into racial intelligence quotients, perhaps computer and robot development which renders human labour unnecessary, perhaps research into the origins of transsexualism, because God says there is no such thing, and so on and so on. It always comes down to value judgments, not to the "dictat of Science". Why blame the messenger?

Therefore I agree completely with Sandra in a fundamental way - we certainly should not trust scientists, for they are human, just like the rest of us. We should not take the morphine of media-reported science, any more than we should take the opium of fossilised religion. We should take responsibility.

WINDERMERE WEEKEND - FRIDAY 19TH TO SUNDAY 21ST MAY

JASMINE

The weekend at Windermere was set in the beautiful countryside of the Lake District, and the venue was the URC Centre which is a lovely house with a pleasant garden. It was a great opportunity to meet new people, rekindle old friendships, and was a time of relaxation, reflection and worship. The theme of the weekend was “Living in the Light“, and brought various reflections on how we need to live within the light and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

The first session was a talk by Nina Parker on the foundation of Liberty Church, (www.libertychurchblackpool.org.uk) which was in its 4th week, and is based in central Blackpool. Nina spoke about her faith journey and how she had been drawn towards a knowledge of God in contrast to her Catholic upbringing and how Jim had introduced her to a more liberating gospel message. Jim felt that being a Christian was a love relationship, which contrasted with the “duty” of being a Christian. Jim felt a great sense of injustice at the way homosexual and transgendered people were treated by churches and in November 2004 started attending Metropolitan Community Church (www.mccmanchester.co.uk), Manchester. Their vision to start an inclusive church grew and they were offered premises from a church in central Blackpool. Their main publicity has been on beer mats in the local gay bars, and so far they have had over 40 people attend over the first few weeks. Many have talked about the relief of finding other gay/trans Christians, and have welcomed the chance for inclusive worship.

Susie Withers brought an evening reflection looking at what is light, and how we use light to show us the way to go. She reflected on how we don't need to physically be able to see to know the spiritual light that can guide your life, and that this light can show us the way to live. As we journey in the Christian life, we need to find a way of coming into the light and living openly. Just as a lighthouse can be seen many miles away we need to allow the light of God's presence to illuminate our lives, so that we can find the right path to follow.

On the Saturday, Michelle Le Morvan brought the morning office, which was a personal meditation of how to live life free from the burdens of living life by the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. She reflected on how it was possible to find freedom in the message that Jesus brought us. His example of inclusion ran against much that the culture tried to impose, and often those in positions of authority erected barriers to maintain social structures rather than provide a path towards God. Finding this path is the Christian's vocation.

After coffee was an opportunity to go on either the mini-bus tour, or to have some free time. About 10 went on the “mystery tour”, which took us into the mountain region between various lakes. Starting out from Windermere we went west through Elterwater along the Wrynose Pass, where we stopped to take pictures. Janet started to do some sprightly mountaineering despite being in her 80's. Taking in the beautiful countryside we continued over Hardknott Pass to the Ravensglass and Eskdale railway, which is a narrow-gauge steam railway where we had lunch, and again we lost Janet who started chatting up the train driver. Taking in West Water, we returned through a mountain pass to Coniston Water, where we all stopped for an ice-cream, before returning to Windermere. Some went to the Steamboat museum, and a trip on the Gondola at Coniston Water, while others just relaxed and chatted back at the centre.

After a lovely dinner came the evening entertainment. This was hosted by Lesley, and was kick started by Jay, who informed us of the risks of being a left-wing socialist trade-unionist in Heaven. I wouldn't like to be sailing at sea with Susie doing her shipping forecast, whilst Elen brought us a reading from a novel that she has been writing about

the quest for the Holy Grail. Rosie's Sunday tea dance was a tribute to Pam. Lesley brought us a couple of songs which launched us into Helen's spoonerisms. She told us a tale of "Rinderella" who went to a bancy fall, and finished with this sage advice, "If going to any bancy fall - slop your dripper".

Suzanne brought us the comparison between dogs and cats, in the forms of their daily diaries. The dog seems find "favourites" in all the day's activities, whereas the cat seems to think that they are being held captive by us mere humans, who don't understand their needs and are determined to get the better of us. Anna recited a Stanley Holloway monologue, while Janet launched into a tale... Barbara and Jane taught us to go to the doctors if you cannot pass water through your elbow, while Christine brought us some observations about mums. Stephanie gave us a delightful rendition of psalm 91. No Sibyls entertainment would be complete without mention of steam trains and this honour fell to Michelle Le Morvan, who brought us a song dedicated to them. Carol exposed the dangers of living in Deptford, while Michelle O'Brien warned us of the dangers of living in a house with no earth wire. Why the electricity board seems to think it's a job for the gas board, we are all still trying to work out. Lesley rounded off the entertainments with another song.

Following the entertainment we all lit candles as part of a meditation brought by Alison and Jasmine on how light shines in the darkness, and reflected on how the word of God is a light to guide us. The peace of the moment brought out prayers for each other, friends, fellowship, and it was good to reflect on how God creates, redeems, and sustains each of us in our daily lives. It was followed by Silence Together.

Jenny-Anne brought Sunday morning worship, Anna celebrated Holy Communion and Suzanne preached. The simplicity of the service brought an overwhelming feeling of community and fellowship, with an opportunity to hold each other in our prayers. Following coffee, and a short meeting to discuss the future of Sibyls, Jay brought a farewell office, before we shared another meal. The weekend was a wonderful time of fun, fellowship and a time to have a break from the routine of everyday life.

A big thank you to all who helped organise it, and to all those who came.

SIBYLS TOGETHER AT WINDERMERE MAY 2006

1. Jay thanked Jenny-Anne and Elen for organising a very successful weekend. It took the load off her and gave experience for the future. She thanked Michelle Le Morvan, Susie, Alison and Jasmine for taking Offices, Lesley for being MC, Barbara for playing for the service, Jenny-Anne and Anna for celebrating and Suzanne for consecrating, Jasmine for undertaking to be scribe, and simply everyone for being there and taking part so enjoyably.
2. A discussion was held about weekends. Jay said that she had been very concerned that by April there had only been 11 bookings for Windermere, normally very popular. The issue had been raised with and discussed by the committee and it was decided that we would approach the houses and see what numbers they needed. Windermere, Whaley Hall and St Columba's were very supportive and therefore the weekends would continue. St Columba's would be a very interesting situation, being back in the South after a gap and with very good speakers. We would talk to Holland House; holding the weekend in September might be more popular than the November date in 2005. From the committee debate came the view that we should concentrate on spirituality, which was what the group was about and what differentiated it from the many

other transgender groups. Jay emphasised that numbers was not what The Sibyls was about; numbers were only important when a house needed sufficient people at weekends to provide the income for survival.

3. It was felt that there should be less wine and more soft drinks at the weekend, which point was taken. Demand never seems in accordance with supply.
4. Michelle O'Brien would be organising the St Columba's weekend and Jay was grateful to her for undertaking this.
5. Jenny-Anne discussed the results of the questionnaire. It was agreed that this needed modification and would be then be sent to all Sibyls for their views on the weekends. It would be interesting to find out members' views.
6. Carol raised the good point that going out from the house on excursions lost some of the togetherness of the weekend. In future we would consider activities in-house for the Saturday morning, leaving the afternoon free.
7. Jay reminded the Sibyls of Russell Reid's case before the GMC, due to be held in October, and said that letters of support for him from those who felt it right to do so would be very welcome. They should be sent to Jay.
8. Rosie has set up, and is developing, a Sibyls web site. Please let her have any ideas for content.

WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LAW?

Jay

The Old Testament presents a major problem to liberal Christianity. There is inevitably an element of picking and choosing, which leaves the fundamentalist Christian in the smug position of being able to say that they are the only true Christians who keep the faith. My instinct that the fundamentalist Christian has missed the point won't carry any weight with such a person.

The dilemma lies in the Law as laid down in the five books of the Torah - Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Now we can all make jokes about eating prawns and selling our sisters into slavery but that doesn't get round the problem that the Old Testament lays down a set of laws which these books say are God's words. In general, the laws are very clear, although there is some confusion, such as the two sets of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Exodus 34).

The Ten Commandments make good reading and there isn't much with which to seriously argue. Possibly coveting his neighbour's ass isn't the worst thing a man could do but mostly it's OK. However, have you read the penalties for transgression? Read through the Torah - the answer is death. Are they really capital offences?

It would be tedious in a short article to keep quoting examples but the Old Testament law ranges from the eminently sensible through the mildly silly to the ignorant and barbaric, usually carrying the death penalty. Quite what God has to do with each and every one of these is difficult to imagine. Whilst such laws may have been deemed suitable for a wandering nomadic tribe, they really don't apply to a society better informed and with a more developed conscience. Don't take my word for it. Read those five chapters and form your own conclusion.

Should you come to the conclusion that Old Testament law is outdated, what are you going to do about it? The tendency is usually to weasel round the words and give them different meanings. Deuteronomy 22.5 is the transvestites' bane and it is usual to say that it applies to Babylonian temple prostitutes and not to "us". Perhaps misbehaviour in Babylon sparked the idea in the first place but it's not what Deuteronomy says. Much has been written to find acceptable ways round it but there the verse sits.

Similarly Deuteronomy 23.1 "No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose organ has been cut off may become a member of the assembly of the Lord" (for once the punishment isn't

death!) and Genesis 1.27 “ Male and female he created them” are used to berate transsexual people.

Personally I find weaselling around the words to be quite unsatisfactory. Is it not more honest to say that these books were written by men who were writing for their time and people in the light of their existing knowledge, such as it was, and no longer have relevance? Has the Spirit not been at work since? The honest thing to do is to accept these books for what they are, an interesting historical record of how one tribe saw its relations with God and each other, and to reject them as having any validity today for spirituality, faith and conduct of life.

These books are from the Stone Age and I am quite happy to reject them. The only effect they have on my life is that the Evangelical Alliance et al interminably quote from them to justify their intolerance.

The problem is more acute these days because of the impact of what is called 9/11. Islam quite literally exploded in a big way into Western consciousness. Islam too is a religion of the book, demanding adherence to that book in a way that Christianity, except in its more fundamental manifestations, does not. Commentators fail to understand why suicide bombers do what they do but the Koran is crystal clear. Infidels are to be killed if they won't convert, and martyrs are guaranteed a passport straight to Paradise. If you deeply believe that, and the alternative is facing God's judgement, martyrdom has considerable appeal to those who feel that they have a grievance and little to lose.

In a conflict of ideas between the West and the Middle East, are not both these blood-stained books a hindrance? Decreeing only a basis for living in the Stone Age, neither is suitable for a free modern civilised world, with proper consideration for women and transgendered people. The world is extremely fortunate that so many Muslims do not adhere strictly to their religion, as is the case for most Christians. Happily most followers of religions don't do what their leaders and their belief systems require - perhaps the most obvious example being western Roman Catholics and contraception.

All religions of the book rely on something which is outdated. They make little or no allowance for God moving in the world and for later revelation. Please, let us have the honesty and courage to reject the irrelevant and out-dated, and to concentrate on being truly human in God's image.

THE BOOK - WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED (May 2006)

Helen Savage

What transgender is and isn't

- 1 Editor: Transgendered lives — examples from Sibyl's stories
- 2 Terry Reed (GIREs): Gender Dysphoria and Transsexualism (5,558 words)
- 3 Russell Reid: Medical response to transsexuality (subject agreed — with method for delivery! - but not yet completed)
[Approx 15,000 words]

Thinking Theologically and Pastorally

- 4 Helen Savage: The Bible tells me so? Transsexuality as a case study in Christian ethics (approx 6,000 words)
- 5 Christina Beardsley: Has the dominant medical model in the care of transsexual people obscured the spiritual aspects of gender transition? (Approx 3,000 words)
[Approx 9,000 words]

Affirming Transgendered Faith

- 6 Jay Walmsley: The story of the Sibyls (approx 2,000 words)
- 7 Personal stories — 11 examples from about 30 words to approx 3,000
[Approx: 12,000 words]

Bibliography - Adapted from Helen Savage's PhD thesis — runs to approx 15 A4 sides!



THE SIBYLS

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For the Transgendered

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WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S WOKING

15 - 17 SEPTEMBER 2006

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 £118.00

24 hour overnight full board £59.00

Day visitor – breakfast £5.10, lunch £7.30, dinner £12.50
morning coffee £1.55, afternoon tea £1.55

If you are not coming for the full weekend please specify the days/meals 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