



# THE SIBYLS

*Christian Spirituality Group for Transgendered People*  
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## **Newsletter No. 48 - December 2008**

**‘Lo! He comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favoured sinners slain;  
Thousand thousand saints attending,  
Swell the triumph of His train:  
Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!  
God appears on earth to reign.’**

**May I wish you all a joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year.**

A huge thank you to Jay for getting us where we are today and for providing us with a quarterly newsletter. This is number 48; producing 47 of them must have been a massive task. Jay; yours is a hard act to aspire to, let alone follow. There will be few changes to the format. To quote my late father; “If it’s not broken, don’t try to mend it.”

It is *YOUR* newsletter so please tell me what you want to see in it. If we can manage it, we’ll do it. Do please send me articles and other contributions; without them, we would manage only about half a dozen pages. Please also let me have up-to-date information about events.

Very many thanks to those who do write. If you can send e-mail, MS word, most other word processors or even just typed, it is very much appreciated. Most items can be scanned, copied or otherwise converted to print.

Please don’t worry if you have no technology; I can copy-type! A few lines or enough to fill two pages, I shall be grateful for anything you send to me.

<b>Please items to:</b>	<b>Mrs Susan Withers</b>	<b>Tel: 01270-250207</b>
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### **OUR MISSION**

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

*Sibyls pray, eat, and talk together, and seek to fulfil Christ’s command to love one another.*

Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Sibyls in general.

## THANK YOU

**Now is a good time to thank those who work behind the scenes for Sibyls. It would be unfair to list them all but thank you, everyone.**

Sibyls now has a steering group (known as 'The Committee') whose members meet on the Internet about once a month or so. Let me introduce them to you.

Rosie Martin lives in Dorset, looks after the membership and the website and also sends out the newsletter to those who receive it by e-mail;

Tina Beardsley lives in Hove, works in London and is liaising with other groups, such as Changing Attitude and Inclusive Church;

Jenny-Anne Bishop has retired to North Wales;

Michelle O'Brien lives in Bournemouth;

All give us the benefit of their wisdom.

I retired to Cheshire and, in addition to editing your newsletter, will post you your copy if you still receive it on paper. If it doesn't arrive, please tell me and I'll scream at Royal Mail – not that it will do any good.

When you think that Jay used to do all this herself...

## LISTENERS

People prepared to listen to others are worth their weight in gold. Michelle, Jenny, Jane, Carol and Jenny-Anne are happy to be available for you to call. If you would like to join the list, please let me know. Do remember that they are not trained to give advice – but a problem shared in confidence often seems less of a burden. If you need someone to talk to, choose which one and give them a ring: -

Michelle Le Morvan 01743 341026   Jenny Bond 01623 836662  
Jane Bowles 01492 660147   Carol Moore 01625 858487  
Jenny-Anne Bishop 01745-337144

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?

## PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for Eileina with breast cancer, David in ongoing illness, Helen for her operation, all those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires, and for all those known to us who are in need, and those with disabilities or who are in pain.

## 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 a meal together – next ones February 5 and April 16.

**MANCHESTER MEETINGS** Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West and North Wales. There is a regular monthly meeting of TransForum (Manchester Trans

Discussion & Support group), 3:30 pm Fourth Saturday, at the Metropolitan Community Church in Manchester MCCM).

MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. JennyAnne can be contacted on 01745-337144 , mobile 07500-741955 or by e-mail [jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk)

The TransForum group has its own web page [www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm](http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm) , there are also directions to the group venue on this website.

You are also most welcome to attend our Sunday communion service at 4:00 pm every Sunday at Metropolitan Community Church , Manchester(MCCM). see [www.mccmanchester.co.uk](http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk)

## **ROSIE'S MEETING - NORTH DORSET**

Every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house. The next meeting will be held at noon on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February. Please give her a ring to confirm attendance (necessary for catering) and to get directions. 01258 830889. No charge, thanks Rosie, but donations to Sibyls if you wish.

Rosie is on the move (eventually) but hopes that she will still be able to hold the meeting. If you've indicated that you'll be attending, she will keep you up to date with plans for the new 'Chez Rosie'.

## **Weekends**

**2009 Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire**

**2009 Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September - Holland House, Worcestershire**

**2010 Friday 21 to Sunday 23 May - Windermere**

**2010 Friday 17 to Sunday 19 September - St Columba's, Woking**

**Help can usually be made available if you would like to go to a weekend but have financial constraints; please talk to Jay in confidence (0208-763-0146).**

## **Other events**

### **JAY'S NEW YEAR GET-TOGETHER 17 JANUARY 2009**

The usual arrangement. Gather at about four o'clock for tea and buns with a communion service taken by the Rev'd Martin Kelly, followed by the hearty buffet. Time for peace and good chat. All welcome but please ring to let Jay know that you are coming. 020 8763 0146.

**There are a number of churches who welcome trans-people. The Metropolitan Community Church embraces diversity. I've been to East London, Manchester and Bournemouth and was welcomed like the prodigal. If you have access to the Internet, a church's mission statement should give you a clue. You could try calling the pastor to ask about their attitude.**

### **WEEKEND AT ST COLUMBA'S, WOKING - SEPTEMBER 2008**

**Jay**

This was a deep and intense weekend, but happily also very enjoyable. The main feature of the weekend was the workshop on Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality organised and run by Tina Beardsley, Michelle O'Brien and Jasmine Woolley. They worked very hard and had organised and planned very thoroughly with the result that it was put over very effectively and professionally. As is inevitable in three such deep and personal topics, some areas will speak more to some than to others and there will

always be different perspectives and points of view. Nevertheless there was a huge amount to get one's teeth into and lots of ideas and insights. While the workshop dominated the time, there was still time for the usual offices, well taken by thoughtful Sibyls, the splendid and uproarious entertainment and an excellent communion service thoughtfully taken by the Rev'd Steve Penrose. Despite St Columba's being a building site, we were looked after very well and the food was a delight. An excellent weekend and Elen's more detailed account can be found later in this newsletter.

## **WEEKEND AT WHALEY HALL - 15-17 MAY 2009**

Elen is organising this, and putting a lot of work into it. Be sure to have the date in your diary and book as soon as you can. By sheer dogged determination, Elen has overcome the slings and arrows of Whaley Hall's booking system and the form is in this newsletter.

Peterson Toscano will be entertaining us. As the saying goes, we have booked him at enormous expense. This will be your one opportunity to see this highly talented young man, who will entertain you and give you some new perspectives on the bible.

## **LONDON EVENING MEETINGS**

**Jay**

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal in a peaceful restaurant with a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. The new Rector at St Anne's the Rev'd David Gilmore has made us very welcome and takes the service.

We still haven't decided on a restaurant and so we will wait at the church until about 6.15 and then go to the restaurant of our choice. That creates a problem if you are late. I will switch on my mobile 07719 726933 and you can ring and get directions.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 40 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.15 a meal at a local restaurant. Next meetings – 5<sup>th</sup> February, 16<sup>th</sup> April. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

## **THE FUTURE OF THE TRANS COMMUNITY?**

**Elen Heart writes:**

The trans community, it seems to me, is focussed almost exclusively upon the present. Yes, we are very aware of our recent past, and not infrequently compare the current situation with how things were X years ago when we first came out of the closet. But on the whole we tend to concentrate on individual journeys within the context of the here and now. What services are available where, and how much do they cost? The future seems to be somewhere that trans people exhibit little interest in, beyond how soon can they obtain their GRS, or are they going to book for next year's big Tranny weekend? Whether or not the Trans community has a future is a question I have never heard asked.

The assumption seems to be that things will carry on more or less as they are now, but with gradually improving public acceptance as new legislation and increasingly sympathetic media coverage alters people's perceptions of us. Transgendered individuals will continue to be born, will transition - probably at an increasingly early age as acceptance grows - and will benefit from ever improving surgical techniques. If any speculation about the future is voiced at all, it is usually around what wonderful medical

procedures may be available to us one day, such as implanted wombs, fully functioning sex organs or lactating breasts!

But will advances in medical science really be so beneficial to us? I can see another - darker - possibility.

The notable advances in biology at the moment are in the understanding - and manipulation - of human genes, and in greater control of the delicate processes that influence foetal development. Some of the hereditary diseases that are currently the subject of foetal Genetic Screening include Cystic Fibrosis, certain forms of Muscular Dystrophy, Spina Bifida, Downs Syndrome, and susceptibility to Coronary Artery Disease or cancer.

Transgendered people have so far benefited from the greater understanding of the role of genes in human development. It has, for example, become increasingly accepted that the desire for transgendered males to dress, act and be like a woman is not a sexual or psychological aberration, but a condition they are born with, most likely caused by genetic variations and/or abnormal hormone levels in the womb. But, as scientific knowledge in these areas grows, and - more importantly - so does the medical establishment's ability to intervene in antenatal processes, I believe that a situation might develop that could threaten the future of transgendered people in the Western world.

I can foresee a time when it is not only genetic susceptibility to diseases such as Cystic Fibrosis or cancer that will be screened for during pregnancy, but also other "abnormalities". And these could include being transgendered. How many parents - if offered the choice - would opt to allow their future son and heir the possibility of wanting to go shopping for feminine fripperies in a skirt and high heels, or of their darling daughter-to-be wanting to join the army and drive a tank?

I am convinced that if the chance to eliminate the risk of their children growing up transgendered were offered to parents, very few - if any - would refuse. In such a situation Trans people could all but disappear from the developed world.

Fanciful? Maybe, but I suspect that such procedures could be with us sooner than we think - within the next half century, I guess.

Should this worry us? That depends upon whether or not the Trans community wants a future. Obviously it will not affect any transgendered individuals - once born transgendered you could not be cured, any more than you can now. But fewer and fewer would be born, until Trans people became a real rarity. Should we be alarmed by this, or should we simply shrug it off as idle speculation? After all, it won't affect any of us. It won't even affect those Trans individuals being born today. It's really only of concern IF the Trans community - as a community - wants to play a part in our society in the future.

Which raises another rather thorny question. Does the Trans community contribute in any way to society as a whole, beyond serving the needs of its own members? I've seen statements made about the contribution of Trans people to society, but these have been formulated mainly to counter discrimination against Trans people (i.e. we can be normal, fully-functioning members of society) rather than promoting any special benefit that we bring to society by being Trans.

Another claim that I have seen made is that the average IQ of Trans people is higher than the average for society at large, but I suspect that this assertion is open to challenge. I'm sure it would require strong scientific evidence of a biological connection between being Trans and increased IQ to make this claim stick.

Does the Trans community have anything to offer the wider community? I think it does, but in a somewhat contentious area. A couple of decades ago radical feminists posed a similar question about a much larger section of society - the whole male gender. The

debate raged for quite a while and some feminist commentators decided that men contributed nothing positive to humanity beyond fathering the next generation, for which purpose a few should be kept as breeding studs, while the rest would be eliminated at birth. I don't intend to re-ignite this inflammatory debate, even though I do agree with the feminists in ascribing many of the world's problems to masculine patterns of thinking, particularly aggressive competitiveness, risk taking and personal status seeking.

Most reasonable contenders in the debate concluded that men contribute far more to society than just their sperm, and that male brain attributes such as analytical, mathematical and spatial thinking, have added a fair bit to human progress. It is now recognised that men and women approach problem solving in quite different ways, and that often the best of all possible solutions is found when both genders work together as equals. Unfortunately, this seemingly straightforward answer to solving our problems is very hard to achieve in practice, largely due to the inherent incompatibility between male and female modes of thought.

My pitch for the Trans community is that Male-to-Female Trans-women frequently exhibit some of those desired male-brain qualities, but generally lack those other masculine tendencies that so inflamed the feminists. Equally, Female-to-Male Trans-men often show typically male drive and entrepreneurial talents, without the attendant aggression and ruthlessness often found in men. I contend that Trans people offer a unique blend of masculine and feminine characteristics that generally reflect the best of both genders. The difficulties of getting male and female thinking co-ordinated are overcome to a large extent when those two modes are present in the same individual.

Whether or not you agree with me, I hope that you will give some thought to the question I have posed. Does the Trans community wish to be more than a loose collection of diverse people each pursuing her or his own goals? If it does, then I believe it's going to need something a bit more substantial than today's thinking to make its case. Diversity training is a great way to encourage the public to accept us as fellow human beings who should not be discriminated against, but that's still a long way from viewing Trans as a desirable state. Somehow we have to make being Trans 'cool', so that when the medical establishment does offer parents a choice, they will at least consider Trans as a possible option. Who knows, we might even succeed into making Trans a life-style choice - for the parents of the next generation!

Is that being too pie in the sky? Probably. It would be good if we could prove the higher IQ claim - that would be a great card to play! But I suspect that the best we can realistically hope for is that public opinion will come down on the side of letting Nature continue to make the choice. And even that - I assert - can only happen if we make it happen.

Do Trans people care enough to make it happen? That is my question - my challenge, if you like - for you all. Have Trans people the desire and determination to create a true community with a distinct identity, and maybe even a purpose? And - most important of all - a community with a future?

## **SIBYLS WEEKEND AT WOKING 12 - 14 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**Elen has sent this account:**

### Friday

This was my second visit to St Columba's House and I was looking forward to it very much, especially as the weekend was to be given over, to a large extent, to an extended workshop on Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality. Michelle O'Brien and Tina Beardsley had trialled this the previous autumn and I, for one, was pleased that they had agreed to give us the full works this year.

The first thing that struck me as we pulled into the car park was that half the house had been hidden behind plastic sheeting and was out of use. The builders were in with a vengeance! The kitchens had been set up temporarily in a Porta-cabin next to the annex, where our meals were to be eaten. This suited me fine, as Jenny-Anne and I were once again housed in the annex. Whereas last year we had had to get dressed and trot across the courtyard for breakfast, we could now simply stroll downstairs in the morning, with everyone sleeping in the main building having to brave the weather for breakfast. A much more civilised idea, to my mind, though I don't doubt that most people preferred the old order!

After Friday evening's meal (and a scrumptious chocolate pudding) we assembled for the introduction session from Tina and Michelle - and Jasmine, who had been co-opted onto their team. We quickly learned that we were in for a busy weekend!

Jenny-Anne and I had agreed to present the Friday Night Office, and we took up the theme of the weekend, attempting to resolve the seemingly irreconcilable aspects of our sexuality (sin) and our spirituality. Our slightly off-the-wall approach inspired some unexpected audience participation; Susie could not contain her giggles at being asked to meditate upon matters erotic (*nothing unusual there... Ed*), and Tina was moved to dance to our closing song from Gloria Gaynor.

After a tiring day working and/or driving (for most of us) it was not long before we made our way to our beds.

### Saturday

The Morning Office was taken by Philippa and Louise, and dealt with sin and mercy in a far more conventional fashion than our office the previous evening. Then it was into the first interactive session of the weekend workshop, "Talking the Walk". We were all asked to describe our trans journey in four minutes, a feat somewhat akin to attempting to précis "War & Peace" in a short story! It was also a challenging and emotional experience for a number of us; a few tears were shed and one or two people were visibly wrestling with personal demons. By the end of the session we had roughed out two key areas for further exploration: self-acceptance and our relationships with others, including that with God.

Following a short break and a much needed cup of strong coffee, we continued by dividing into three separate groups to explore how our gender, sexuality and spirituality were expressed in our identities, roles and in practice. I was in the team headed by Tina, along with Jay, Janet and Philippa, and it is a tribute to the atmosphere of complete trust and safety that Sibyls engenders that I learned a good deal about the inmost thoughts and feelings of my companions. I found the session very comfortable as I am an inveterate 'navel gazer' and will reveal all to anyone who's patient enough to listen, but I appreciate that for others it was more difficult. Not everyone is as much of an exhibitionist as I am!

The morning ended with reports back from each of the groups, somewhat hurried as our introspective digging had taken a little longer than planned and lunch could not be kept waiting. It was a lunch that would have been worth waiting for, in my book at least: delicious pasta in tomato sauce with Parmesan cheese and warm bread! I struggled to resist eating too much as I tend to doze off during the afternoon when I do, though the afternoon session was not conducive to dozing, entailing as much physical as mental exertion.

It began with some communal shaking, of our arms legs and bodies, after which we lay on the floor while Tina read a story about an older man's relationship with a young boyish girl, taken from Frederik Rolfe's "The Desire & Pursuit of the Whole". We were asked to visualise different aspects of the story and explore the gender implications, but

I fear I may have succumbed to the pasta! Thankfully this was followed by more active participation. Firstly we paired up - I was with Louise - and gave each other a shoulder massage (very relaxing), and then we all explored gender through walking in a variety of ways. This ended up as a sort of cross between a deportment class and Monty Python's 'silly walks'!

That afternoon's rather unusual workshop continued with various Sibyls displaying pictures that they had brought along on a brightly patterned shawl that Tina had laid on the floor. Without my prior knowledge Jenny-Anne produced some photographs of me, one or two of which were a little risqué (just as well I am a bit of an exhibitionist!). We finished with circle dancing and a novel form of group hug, suggested by Carol Nixon, in which we joined hands and wound ourselves around her, as if spooling yarn.

At tea Susan Gilchrist and her partner Jan joined us for the rest of Saturday, which continued with Sibyls Together (Jay reported in full in Newsletter 47). Bernard and Terry Reed from GIREs were further additions to our numbers for dinner - a tasty menu of cream of cauliflower soup followed by roast chicken - and the evening's entertainment.

Without Lesley, the entertainment was a little like a circus without the Ring Master, but Susie did a gallant job of introducing the motley collection of acts. Jenny-Anne opened the proceedings with a short music quiz, in which teams of two had to name popular tunes from the 1960s after listening to a snatch of the opening bars. When the answers were given, Jay and Bernard had apparently scored an amazing 50 out of 50, until it was realised that Jenny-Anne had left the CD case (with the answers) right next to Jay! Once the culprits had confessed - and been suitably forgiven - the true winners were found to be Philippa and Louise, two of our younger members, putting to shame some of us who should well remember the 1960s!

Carol Nixon followed with readings that reflected the theme of the weekend: quotations from "Evolutions Rainbow" by Joan Roughgarden, illustrated by Michelle O'Brien with a photograph of a Vanuatu pig on her mobile phone. Carol Belfield then recited a poem by John Betjeman, Janet regaled us with three Australian songs - rendered with more enthusiasm than accuracy - and Jasmine gave us another amusing poem.

Louise then led us in a rousing chorus of The Wild Rover, and Tina executed an expressive dance she had learned at her ballet classes (having missed out as a child!). At one point she had to restart the performance as she seemed to have the wrong music playing. Lana sang us some popular music hall songs, and Susie read us a couple of items. The first was uncharacteristically serious, but the second was to her usual hilarious standard, with Michelle O'Brien doing her best in the mirth stakes to make up for Rosie's absence! Jay rounded off the entertainment with another dance. No sword this time, but a belly dancer's tribute to the musical "Chicago": the "Razzle Dazzle".

The evening was closed - and our minds prepared for a restful night after all the jollity - with a quiet and thoughtful Night Office by Michelle Le Morvan.

### Sunday

Susie opened the proceedings with a contemplative Morning Office, based on 'thoughts for the morning', largely about self acceptance. Then Michelle O'Brien led a summing up session of the weekend's workshops, which fed into a discussion on what we felt we should bring to God, what we mourned and what we could celebrate.

With these thoughts in our minds we went into the Communion Service, which was led by the Reverend Steve Penrose. This was based largely upon a Methodist service, though adapted for Sibyls, I'm sure; the peace went on far longer and was far more thorough than I suspect is usual in most Methodist churches! To my mind the administering of communion was unnecessarily complicated. We each had to pass first the bread and then the wine to the person next to us, who would then give us



communion before passing the vessels to the next person. Most of us got the hang of it fairly quickly, but it confused poor Janet who didn't know whether she was giving or receiving. At the end of the service we reprised Gloria Gaynor, "I Am What I Am", and some of us danced a conga around the chapel, lead by Tina and myself. I don't know what the Reverend Penrose must have thought!

We had just enough time for the traditional group photograph - in the small garden by the Annex - before Sunday lunch and our departure. Dinner was excellent - roast lamb followed by another chocolate pudding - after which we sat and had coffee and chats in the reception area, not wanting to leave (the fact that Jasmine - who was our passenger - was involved in a debriefing meeting with Michelle and Tina was a very convenient excuse!)

I shall definitely be at Whaley Hall next May, which is just as well as I shall be organising the weekend! See you all there, I hope.

## **CHRISTIAN SEX**

### **Sandra Moore writes:**

Jay, in Newsletter 47, takes up the comments I made in Newsletter 46 about homosexuality, and her comments maybe call for another suggestion from me.

I feel that we have experienced in our lifetime a tremendous expansion of interest in cultures outside what used to be called "our own". It is now possible to some extent to imagine ourselves back in situations far removed from 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

Jay ends "But then, thankfully, it is of no consequence to anyone else what I think. But I still don't understand exactly how we got to the point that Christian sex is only within marriage between a man and a woman."

But, to take the first part of that statement first: dear Jay, how do you think that notion - that you can think what you like - would have been received in (say) Nazi Germany?

This is but a recent example. In fact, Nazi Germany is a source of vast and profound interest to people today. Why? Surely because it demonstrated a society whose values and attitudes were like a throwback to an ancient time, to a kind of collective dream-like consciousness totally out of touch with the evolution of mankind, and in strenuous opposition to it.

In that sense it had elements of something else too, namely the perception of "blood consciousness" or "racial intelligence or guidance."

One need only study in detail the incredible ideas of Himmler about breeding the 'ubermensch', etc, to realise how people lived there in a state of mind which today would land them in hospital. The general public were expected to obey and accept and listen to the voice of the German blood inside them.

Therefore it became of exceptional importance to the Nazis to have a high birth rate, and for women to see it as a duty to beget "true Germans." It is true that Hitler, in his early days in Vienna, brooded on fantasies of the 'blonde German maiden' threatened by the 'sub-human virus-like beings' of another race. His favourite epithet was "Jewish-Bolshevist."

Then followed all the grisly business of extermination and so on, racial purity and stuff which, to us now, only 60 years later, appears almost unbelievable. Could any authors invent anyone so peculiar as Hitler or Stalin?

But this does give us the possibility to understand that what is completely mad and destructive in one epoch, may have been the norm, even appropriate, in an earlier one. After all, we hear of a man, maybe 3500 years ago, who regarded himself, and was

regarded, as a magician. He led a group of people of one race away from captivity and led them around in a desert in isolation for 40 years! How would this be regarded today? He heard a voice, from a mountain top, which gave him instructions and behaviour which his people followed. Try saying you have had a similar experience to a psychiatrist!

His immediate successor then led these people into a land occupied by others, which they took possession of by what might be called 'manifest destiny' which meant 'survival of the fittest.'

Quite obviously, this race considered itself special and history seemed to prove this, especially as 'the voice' seemed to guarantee success; so long as one was obedient to it.

Examining ancient cultures, one finds that this was not so unusual. Each culture experienced its race and tribal sense of itself bound up with its ancestral line. And the inner coherence of the race depended on loyalty to this. It was, in fact, considered a grievous sin for a person to seek to exalt himself by use of personal individual intelligence. The truth is that anything a person 'discovered' by use of personal thought must be controlled by, and subjected to, the authority of the voice of the tribal God, considered as the divine essence of the race.

One may doubt this, but careful reading of the Old Testament will confirm the struggle of the Jewish people to remain pre to its original mission, and this involving purity of blood. And this purity entailed the promise that the 'King of the world' would be born after a certain time within this race.

Given such a milieu, of a people hardened in desert conditions, separated from Nature; by overcoming weaker tribes, etc, and recognising in their own way that their characteristics would be passed on by heredity, is it surprising that adultery was considered a terrible sin? The individual (in those ancient times) was, in fact, to consider himself as merely an agent of the tribal state; as worker, soldier huntsman and father of new children, and to consider *herself* as bearer of tribal blood in which the voice of God spoke, and as a source of children and their nurture.

Marx, by a quirk of destiny, denied the existence of these tribal gods and divinities, which in the case of the Jews, condensed to one invisible voice, and imagined that everything was just economics. But, essentially, an individual Jew felt in those days that outside his race he was nothing; more or less non-existent.

Therefore one can see how adultery and homosexuality must have been viewed. They were disobedience to the tribal voice, to the blood consciousness and its mission.

Is it then surprising that the Greeks, whose development was different, and focussed far more on the development of personal intelligence, had a far different attitude to these things, and to sex in genera' namely that it was more a personal matter, part of one's own development as a person.

Is it surprising then how the meeting of Greco-Pagan culture and Jewish Semitic culture was experienced in so fraught a way, and tat their marriage in people like Paul, John and Stephen were experienced with opposition. For they perceived that Jesus (or Messiah) and Christos were one in the person Jesus Christ, whereas in other races the tribal voice was supported by attachment to outward symbols and statues, etc.

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**Jay has already seen Sandra's item and has this reply:**

Thank you for your response to my little piece in the newsletter.

I fear that you are right in that mankind has always been encouraged, sometimes

forcibly, to think along the lines of the society in which the individual lived. Individuality was not encouraged, indeed very much the reverse. The bible is very keen to discourage attempts to think for oneself. Perhaps this insistence on the norm is why the sins listed tend to be those of personal indulgence. Certainly Jesus must have been an enormous shock to the system.

The Greeks certainly brought a new way of thought which perhaps didn't really start to flower until the Enlightenment in Europe. The succeeding centuries have brought new thinkers and their ideas to the fore; we are reaping the benefit. As you say, I can think what I like, and I'm not going to be executed or put in jail for it. I know I wouldn't have survived the Nazis but there are other totalitarian regimes, the Soviet Union, China, Pol Pot's infamous Cambodia, none of which tolerated the faintest deviation from the party line.

Sadly many of the adherents of the religions of the book would clearly be as intolerant if only they had the power.

With best wishes,

~ O ~

## **STANDIN' IN DE NEED OF PRAYER**

**Deirdre**

Prayer is one of the most basic needs of the Christian, as vital as breathing is to life. It's also one of the most underestimated sources of encouragement and strength, so important to anyone who lives on the edge of what society may expect or will tolerate. It's certainly not easy convincing those who do not practise it that it has practical value!

In a previous existence I was responsible for the administration of examinations: hardly, you might think, the most exciting of occupations! It did however have its rewards. One of the duties involved negotiating with the examination boards the degree of concessions available to those who were in any way impaired, among them for example dyslexic students. They often felt disadvantaged, which added to the tensions they suffered in approaching examinations. To know that a concession would enable them to look forward to being quite fairly assessed was often of enormous value, for it took away the tension; this in turn meant they could concentrate on the work in hand, which would often improve in its own right as a result.

It's a well-known fact that during his earthly life Jesus was always reaching out to those on the margins of society, whether their perceived disadvantage was caused by political or religious prejudice, poverty or sickness. He told the disciples (John 6:37): "Anyone who comes to me I will never turn away"; speaking to the crowds at the Passover in Jerusalem (John 12:32) he said: "When I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw everyone to myself". This was absolute - no distinctions were drawn, and no exceptions listed. Surely that includes a TV, who may be unsure of his or her position in society, among friends or even within the Church. Michelle's article published in the newsletter earlier this year defined approval as "a prison", and longed for freedom. We all have perceptions of ourselves in whatever guise; seeing ourselves in relationship with others - or even excluded - is often an important part of our identity.

This I saw as a call to prayer: a chance to see ourselves, or articulate our situation, in such a way as to know that we are accepted. The Thursday meetings in the London Church of St Anne offer a setting in which to address this. And did not Our Lord invite us to pray alone with the door closed? Matthew 6:6 opens the way to pray in secret with the promise that "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Part of that reward is, I believe, finding the way to peace and acceptance of ourselves by a loving Saviour who sees all, knows all and still loves us. Think of the old Gospel hymn that includes these words:

O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.

Nor should we ignore the wonderful line from Hamlet: "This above all: to thine own self be true". So let's use the precious gift of prayer to be ourselves, to reach that promised state of peace with our true nature, free from fear and tension, knowing that we are accepted and loved where it really matters.

## **STICK IN THE MUD**

**Susie**

One of my dear friends at our local parish church has referred to me as an 'Anglican non-conformist' – I said that she was half right. If I must tick a box, I prefer to call myself a non-denominational non-conformist.

I recently shared my vision of the future of the church buildings with our vicar.

He winced and said that the congregation wouldn't go for it. That's a similar problem to those that have dogged the mainstream churches for years.

## **WHEN RAYMUS SAW HIS PAST LIFE**

**Raymus Bowerbank**

I was browsing in a charity shop the other day. As many of your readers know, in my former life as a woman, I was a nun and then a topless model. In the shop I noticed a painting of a still life class. Yes, there was the topless model holding her pose. And one of the students sketching/painting her was a nun! I looked and thought about the coincidence of it all. I thought, "Oh look! There's me in two versions!"

## **THE INEVITABLE CHRISTMAS JOKE**

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates.

'In honour of this holy season' Saint Peter said, 'You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven.'

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on.

'It represents a candle', he said.

'You may pass through the pearly gates' Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, 'They're bells.'

Saint Peter said 'You may pass through the pearly gates'.

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's panties.

St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, 'And just what do those symbolize?'

The man replied, 'These are Carols.'

~ O ~



Ben's curate would go to any lengths to avoid  
taking the 8.00 service

## THE POPE AND THE RABBI

Several centuries ago, the Pope decreed that all the Jews had to convert or leave Italy. There was a huge outcry from the Jewish community, so the Pope offered a deal. He would have a religious debate with the leader of the Jewish community. If the Jews won, they could stay in Italy, if the Pope won, they would have to leave.

The Jewish people met and picked an aged, but wise, Rabbi Moishe to represent them in the debate. However, as Rabbi Moishe spoke no Italian and the Pope spoke no Hebrew, they all agreed that it would be a "silent" debate.

On the chosen day, the Pope and Rabbi Moishe sat opposite each other for a full minute before the Pope raised his hand and showed three fingers.

Rabbi Moishe looked back and raised one finger.

Next, the Pope waved his finger around his head.

Rabbi Moishe pointed to the ground where he sat.

The Pope then brought out a communion wafer and a chalice of wine.

Rabbi Moishe pulled out an apple.

With that, the Pope stood up and declared that he was beaten, that Rabbi Moishe was too clever, and that the Jews could stay.

Later, the Cardinals met with the Pope, asking what had happened.

The Pope said, "First, I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there is still only one God common to both our beliefs. Then, I waved my finger to show him that God was all around us. He responded

by pointing to the ground to show that God was also right here with us. I pulled out the wine and wafer to show that God absolves us of all our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of the original sin. He had me beaten and I could not continue."

Meanwhile the Jewish community were gathered around Rabbi Moishe.

"How did you win the debate?" they asked.

"I haven't a clue," said Rabbi Moishe. "First he said to me that we had three days to get out of Italy, so I gave him the finger. Then he tells me that the whole country would be cleared of Jews and I said to him, we're staying right here."

"And then what?" asked a woman.

"Who knows?" said Moishe, "He took out his lunch, so I took out mine."

~ O ~



## THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for  
transgendered people

12 Ffordd Las  
Rhyl  
Denbighshire  
LL18 2DY

Tel: 01745-337144

### WEEKEND AT WHALEY HALL 15-17 MAY 2009

Name .....

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room .....

Willing to share with .....

Address .....

.....

.....

Phone No. ....

Email address .....

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch	£125.00	.....
24 hour overnight – afternoon to lunch	£60.00	.....
Day visitor - All meals	£25.00	.....
- Lunch and tea/coffee	£20.00	.....
- Evening meal and tea/coffee	£20.00	.....

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? .....

Do you need help with transport to Whaley Hall? .....

Can you offer a lift to someone? .....

***Please send this form with your cheque to Elen Heart, address above, ASAP***