



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Transgendered People
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Newsletter No. 50 - Summer 2009

Thank you very much to our contributors to this edition; Cerys, Jay, Stephen, Jenny-Anne and Rosie and a special thank you to Michelle le Morvan, who has been such a blessing to our group, and who will, I know, be very much missed.

Please send me articles and other contributions; please also let me have up-to-date information about events.

Very many thanks to those who do write or send me items for publication. If you can send e-mail, MS word, most other word processors or even just typed (with a decent ribbon!), it is very much appreciated. Newspaper cuttings can often give a different slant on things and can usually be scanned.

Please don't worry if you have no technology; I can copy-type if necessary. **BUT... please bear in mind that I am Severely Visually Impaired so, if you must send me hand-written contributions, please make sure that I will be able to read them! If you have something handwritten and it runs to several pages, please think about (a) having a friend type it for you, or (b) telephoning me, and I will audio-type it straight into the newsletter.**

A few lines or enough to fill a few pages, I shall be grateful for anything you send.

Please send items to:

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

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.

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for David in ongoing illness, Ruby in hospital, Barbara Ross's Conference, 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.

MICHELLE Le MORVAN

It was with great sadness, though mixed with a liberal dose of joy on her behalf, that I learned today, 17th June, that Michelle has at last gone to that place where pain is no more and peace reigns supreme. Even though she knew that her total kidney failure was beyond repair, she spoke of her calmness and wrote to me in January 2009, sending me 'the last thing that I will ever write'. She specifically requested that it be published after she had died, and it appears later in this Newsletter.

Despite a medical history that would have defeated many lesser mortals, and a world that often thought it knew better than she, Michelle never failed to radiate peace and tranquillity. Even in her last days, that kind voice, full of Michelle's profound wisdom, would bring me to a place where all my troubles seemed so far away. I count myself greatly blessed to have known this gentle soul, whose face lit up with a beautiful smile when meeting friends old and new. Goodbye, my dear friend; Promoted to Glory, indeed.

LISTENERS

People prepared to listen to others are worth their weight in gold. 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: -

Jenny Bond 01623-836662
Carol Moore 01625-858487

Jane Bowles 01492-660147
Jenny-Anne Bishop 01745-337144

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

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 August 13.

MANCHESTER; 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) – **please see below**.

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

The TransForum group web page is 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

NOTE: Please do check the website, or with Jenny-Anne, as arrangements for MCC and the TransForum may change in the near future.

ROSIE'S MEETING - DORSET

Every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house. The next meetings will be held at noon on 17th October 2009, 20th February 2010, 12th June 2010 – all Saturdays. Please give her a ring to confirm attendance (necessary for catering) and to get directions. **01425-270540**. No charge, thank you Rosie, but donations to Sibyls (if you wish) would be greatly appreciated.

OTHER INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

City United Reform Church, Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190. You'll find its website at www.cityurc.org.uk. Revd. Monica Mills has written to tell us that this church welcomes all to their Sunday service at 1030am.

Please let me know of any others and I will include details in the Newsletter.

OTHER MEETINGS

JAY'S GARDEN PARTY - SATURDAY 4th JULY 2009

Like the January get-together but a garden party. Give Jay a ring if you want to come. 020 8763 0146.

Weekends

2009 Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September – PLEASE NOTE THAT THE HOLLAND HOUSE WEEKEND IS CANCELLED – SEE BELOW.

2009 Friday 13 to Sunday 15 November - St Deiniol's Library. See below.

2010 Friday 21 to Sunday 23 May - Windermere

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

2011 Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

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).

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. If I find out any more I'll try to include details in the Newsletter.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

Jay

The June meeting was bedevilled by the Tube strike. However an intrepid three met to enjoy a good service and a splendid meal together. These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, followed by a good meal in a peaceful restaurant with a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. The Rector at St Anne's, the Rev'd David Gilmore, makes 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 W1 D 6AF, 40 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it says so and is), and from about 6.15 a meal at a local restaurant. Next meetings - Thursday 13 August, 8 October. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

CONFERENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA - TG09

Later in this Newsletter, you will find a flyer for Barbara Ross's weekend at the University of East Anglia. This is a full-on learning experience and a great opportunity to make and renew friendships; I was able to attend TG07 and did just that, besides learning more about the different situations in which many of us find ourselves.

With a cast of 'stars' from all corners of the Trans community, this again promises to be an excellent conference.

In case you manage to overlook the telephone number of the booking line, it's 01508-549193.

WEEKEND AT WHALEY HALL - 15-17 MAY 2009

Elen did a first-class job of organising this and Peter Toscano was, as Jay assured us, 'extremely good value for money'. He is highly talented, very amusing, yet thought-provoking and left many of us wishing that the weekend would never end. His presentation style was radically different and his ability to jump from one convincing character to another was astounding. He joined us for much of the time, including meals, and left at least me feeling that a 'Gospel according to PT' would be a very entertaining and gripping read.

WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE - SEPTEMBER 2008 - CANCELLED

For administrative reasons, **this weekend is cancelled**. We have arranged an alternative location as we are aware of how popular these weekends are; giving, as they do, a unique opportunity for fellowship in a non-threatening environment. We realise that the St Deiniol's Library weekend won't suit everyone but I must thank Jenny-Anne very much for finding it for us. Meanwhile, please be aware that the Holland House location is unavailable to us this September.

WEEKEND AT St. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY - NOVEMBER 2008

We are organising this at the moment and I recently went to 'case the joint'. A booking form is at the end of this Newsletter.

Please bear in mind that THIS IS NOT AN EXCLUSIVE HIRING. We will necessarily be sharing the premises with up to a couple of dozen other people. It is, however, an inclusive venue and has hosted LGBT groups. The Metropolitan Community Church in Manchester have held events there and, judging by the friendliness of the Warden, his wife and all the staff, we will have a great time.

If you do join us, please be prepared to share at least mealtimes and refreshment breaks with people outside our group. You may also bump into them at other times in our travels around the premises. Please look upon this, firstly, as an opportunity to make new friendships and, secondly, to help to explode the myth that we are 'not normal'.

God and His creation revel in diversity; 'Different' equals 'Normal'. Let us take the opportunity to continue the spread of this message far and wide.

Internet users can obtain further details from www.st-deiniols.org

St Deiniol's is at Harwarden, in Flintshire. A beautiful building, well over 100 years old, the inside has been refurbished to include three en-suite rooms (the two ground floor rooms plus one other), which will be allocated according to need.

We have been thinking along the lines of 'The Image of God' and, knowing how this group takes a topic and runs with it, we are anticipating some very productive and thought-provoking workshops.

I have some brochures; I can send you a copy if you are interested.

OASIS MEETINGS

Rosie Martin

It was a very nervous 'new girl on the block' that set out from our home in Dorset to drive to Petersfield on Friday 7th February 2003. This was to be the very first time Rosie had ventured out into the big wide world and although I had originally planned to change on arrival, I decided to drive the 70 miles there and back 'dressed'. With the help of my dear wife Pam I managed to get out of the house and the village without being seen and then we just took our time for the first stage of our trip to Eastleigh where I had arranged to collect Susie.

Susie immediately put me at my ease and we got on with one another from the moment we met, almost as though we had known each other all our lives. We eventually arrived at our destination just to the west of Petersfield having lost our way and nearly finishing up in Fareham! Jenny, who kindly opened her house to this little group three times a year, welcomed us, and we then met Michelle Le Morvan and Tina Beardsley who, with Jackie Brookfield were the founder members of the group. Other Sibyls members there that day were Alice Vandervell, Annie Parffett, Jay Walmsley and Suzanne.

I find it hard to believe now that this was more than six years ago. It seems just like yesterday and yet, in a strange way, it also seems like a lifetime ago. And now, six years later to the day, on Saturday 7th February 2009, I found myself hosting the latest Oasis meeting and the last to be held at my home in Tarrant Hinton in Dorset.

The genesis of Oasis goes back to a time when Jackie Brookfield found herself counselling two people with gender dysphoria and quite simply didn't know how best to help and support them. Her own story of Oasis follows this article and says much about a wonderfully sensitive Christian person simply living out Christ's command to love one another.

The basic format of Oasis has remained the same down the years: gather at about noon, coffee, a service of Holy Communion followed by lunch and then an opportunity to relax and just be oneself in the company of others until about 4 o'clock or so. It's a format that has worked well in the past and still seems to work for those who attend today so why change it?

I remember seeing a film some years ago when a British Ambassador was asked to explain *'this change of attitude'*, and his response was *'it's not a change of attitude, it's a change of strategy'*, and I now believe that we need to consider a change of *'strategy'* for our future Oasis meetings.

Although the present format has stood the test of time, there can be no denying the fact that the membership of this little group has changed considerably over the years, and this is perhaps most significantly reflected in the presence of three couples at the last meeting on 7th February.

Oasis has provided exactly what it says on the tin: an oasis of time and space within which to commune with God as our true selves. But it seems to me that the emphasis has always been on 'us' and has never really considered the needs of spouses, partners and those who support us on a day by day basis.

By the time you read this I will be on the far side of all the stress associated with moving my home into a new house in Dorset, but it is my intention to continue to host the Oasis meetings for as long as people continue to gain something positive from them. But more than that, I would like to see my move as an opportunity to expand the concept of Oasis by offering not only support to 'us' but also to all those without whom our journeys of self-discovery would be so much more difficult.

My hope is that when we hold the next meeting in June, spouses and partners will feel that they are able to come along not to just be part of the group, but to truly benefit from the spiritual and emotional support that I believe we are all able to offer one another. I know that had my Pam lived she would have been offering such support long ago and would have been organising far better meetings than I can ever do – for a start she was a much better cook! So I would like to dedicate this change of 'strategy' for Oasis to her memory and hope and pray that we may continue and expand the good work that Jackie started all those years ago.

(My sincere apologies for omitting this and the article by Jackie Brookfield from the Spring 2009 Newsletter; as I say "I'm not a complete idiot; some bits are missing"). And all I can say about Rosie's cooking is – she must have had a good teacher, and she gives those television chefs a good run for their money.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OASIS MEETINGS

Jackie Brookfield

Rosie has asked me to give an account of how the Oasis Meetings began, how it all came about. It was a strange and, for me, an incredibly privileged journey. Those of you who know me will be aware that my profession is that of a Counsellor. In that role I found myself working with two clients about whom I was completely at a loss. At that time I had never heard seriously about the issues around being transgendered – I did not even know that such a condition

even existed! I was on a steep learning curve! Looking back I began to realise that I had indeed met people like this before but without any involvement or understanding. In fact, I remembered two members of the congregation of a church in which I worshipped whom I would now recognise, but then were simply 'strange'. I asked my Vicar about them (a sincerely Godly man), and he said "If they are not welcomed in the Church, then where can they go?" But that is 40 years ago and things have moved on although I am aware that the Church can inflict terrible hurt even now.

I have digressed, but I think I want to clarify my starting point of no knowledge and no real understanding. However, a Counsellor is trained to listen, to reflect, to be non-judgemental, and just to stay with the client. Slowly a picture began to emerge and some understanding flickered. I felt that my clients needed to know one another and others making the same or a similar journey. I advertised in the Church Times, people responded, and Oasis was born. The beginnings were a bit shaky but the group soon developed a dynamic of its own, a safe place to be the way God loves you, the real person so often disguised from family, friends and fellow Christians. I fear that without Jay's support and encouragement we may have foundered, but I believe that Oasis is now an integral part of Sibyls and enjoying Rosie's generous hospitality.

Thank you to the friends who have generously allowed me to travel with them a little way on their journey. It has been a privilege and a joy; I have seen something of the intolerance meted out by some who call themselves Christian, just a little of the struggle my friends have endured – and survived. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your lives. God bless you all.

CHRISTIAN APPROACHES TO TRANSGENDER AWARENESS Stephen

What is Transgender? This was what the participants of a 'Hot Topic' discussion on Transgender issues had to think about in a session run by our local church back in 2005. This is a middle-of-the-road Anglican church with a congregation of wide-ranging ages made up of professional and working-class families. Following on from that session, a small group was formed involving people from different local churches, to explore Transgender issues further. There were 8 members, including a priest, 2 readers and a transperson, so the group represented a fairly wide cross-section of the church.

The Group became "TAG" standing for "Trans Awareness Group" and decided that it had three aims:

- to raise its own awareness of the issues;
- to contribute to the Church of England's listening process by writing a report;
- to be available as a resource for other Church groups.

We took as our starting point Chapter 7 "Transsexualism" in the Bishops' 2003 report: *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*. At each meeting we considered one of the sections from the chapter and its related questions, which sometimes involved watching a TV programme (*My Mums Used to be Men*), a film (*Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*) or having a visiting speaker: Christina came to our session on Transpeople in the Church. We then held further meetings to look at additional topics which had been missed out of the Bishops' report but which were relevant to the debate, particularly in a pastoral context as well as considering the medical background. These included:

- Stages in the Trans Journey
- Partner Issues
- Children (including Trans-Children and Children of Transparents)
- Pastoral issues within the Church

One of the issues that TAG members found disturbing was the high incidence of attempted suicide among children who identify as Transgender, often because of lack of support and understanding. We also took into account changes in legislation which had taken place since the publication of the Bishops' Report, in particular the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The group's discussions were distilled into a report which concluded with some recommendations about the need for open discussion, the importance of pastoral support for transpeople, their families and their congregations, and the provision of support, training and advice to clergy dealing with this situation.

Ultimately the group had some concerns about the approach of the Bishops' Report, since although this had raised a number of important areas, it had failed to take account of historical and social contexts in looking at Bible passages, and there had been no evidence of consultation with medical or psychological specialists, or with any transgendered people. Nor had the Bishops' Report addressed any pastoral issues for transgendered people, their families or congregations.

The group's report was sent to the authors of the Bishops' Report by way of response and also to Rev Philip Groves, co-ordinator of the Church of England's Listening Process, as well as to local clergy, archdeacons and bishops for their consideration. It was also distributed at the Lambeth Conference as part of a fringe seminar: "Listening to Trans People."

As a result of the circulation of the report locally, the group were invited to make a presentation to an open meeting of our local Deanery Synod (which has representatives from 23 Anglican churches) in January 2009. The session began with an introduction to the work of the group and a prayer, followed by a short talk on Transgender: what it was, what sort of treatment was available and an outline of the legal position. Following the talk, the meeting was split into discussion groups, each being given a different scenario involving a transperson to discuss and to decide what a Christian response might be. The scenarios included transchildren as well as adults and focussed on settings such as funerals, baptisms and Sunday School as well as presenting situations with adults at different stages of transition. The groups then fed back their deliberations to the meeting as a whole and were provided with a list of useful resources (books, websites, organisations etc) to take away with them.

We were delighted to discover how willing people were to engage with the topic, particularly given that it was new to many of them. More than that, they demonstrated themselves ready to reach out to transgendered people and their families in a spirit of understanding and Christian love, and to find ways of offering support to all involved, including the congregation and vicar, for whom it might be an unfamiliar and daunting concept. To our amazement there was no negativity, no voice raised in opposition and a clear recognition that there was a need for education in what they had not previously realised was such a complex area. It was a very positive, affirming experience of the work we had been undertaking over the last 4 years, with the overwhelming message from the meeting being that transgendered people were children of God and that as individuals they must not be rejected.

We had worried that there might only be a handful of people there on a cold night in winter: in fact there were about 50. Even when our group Chair, who should have given the talk, was taken ill and was unable to attend, another member of the group stepped in to do this. We felt very clearly that God had led us to this point and that He was very much present in the meeting. It was evident that just as society had moved on in the last decade, so have church congregations who are, after all, part of that society.

At our de-briefing meeting one of the group commented that she had sensed a feeling of relief among the Synod members that they had an opportunity to discuss transgender openly and to explore the issues in a constructive way.

Our hope now is that more groups will ask for our help, either by way of a presentation or workshop, or to help them to facilitate their own exploration of transgender issues.

If other Sibyls would like to organise something similar in their own churches, we would be happy for you to make use of our report and scenario case studies. Please contact me by e-mail at ajptag@yahoo.co.uk if you would like a copy.

Anne Passmore, TAG secretary

~ O ~

A SPIRITUAL PATH

Michelle Le Morvan

Now, at the age of 76, as I look back on my journey. I can distinguish five aspects of what seems to me the path along which I am still moving, and which will lead me to the end of the road. They are not chronological but interwoven with one another.

Awareness

Becoming aware of myself and of my life and of the world in which I move. This involves listening to my body - emotionally as well as physically and mentally. The divine presence lives within and without, and it is the only way it can speak to me.

Acceptance

Life is what it is, whether we like it or not. It is *what* it is and we cannot change it. There is actually no such thing as good or bad luck. If we wish to learn and grow up, our only teacher is life - what is. We cannot change it, only learn from it and work with it.

Surrender

To know what is, and accept it, leads to a surrender to something greater than ourselves. This is not the same as 'giving up', and passively lying down; it is a positive acceptance of reality and a working with the reality to the utmost of our powers to fulfil our destiny in life. Each of us has a task to fulfil, no matter how small it may be. Only I can fulfil my destiny. It is personal to me.

Gratitude

Meister Eckhart said that if we were only to say one prayer, it should be one of thanks. Even when days are bad - and some can be awful, full of pain and despair, I have learnt to say 'Thank you'. There is always something, no matter how small, to say 'Thank you' for, even through gritted teeth. Often it is the only prayer I can now say, especially

when I look back on my journey, and see the 'impossible' path along which I have travelled, and all the wonderful people who have walked part of my journey with me.

Love

This aspect of the journey envelops and enfolds all the others. As these earlier aspects come together they are bonded in love. As Richard Rohr writes "The greatest command is not 'you shall be right' but 'you shall be in love'". From my own experience I know I have disliked and detested myself because I could not live up to the ideal of religious perfection demanded of me. Then I slowly began to see that it was all irrelevant, and that I was loved exactly as I was - no earning this love. As the judgmental me began to fade, I began to see others in a new way, and this is helping me to be less judgmental of others, and to begin to open out to them. This has changed my openness to the Divine Presence. It has also freed me from the religious chains which had bound me for seventy years with all their 'shoulds' and 'oughts', doctrines and dogmas. For me it is the freedom that Jesus came to bring, and which lies at the heart of the Gospel.

1.

All my life I had sought *Approval*, and it was a powerful Drug. It was only at the age of 68, when I was living alone in a rented cottage that I became free - I had a complete breakdown which lasted three months at the beginning of 2001. Coming through this pain, I was finally able to face myself and then begin to move on. It was awful, but it was the healing I needed, and my life changed forever. Be prepared to face the pain and loss, if you want to be free.

Together with the Gospels, I have been helped especially by two wonderful books I have read and reread, viz 'Awareness' by Anthony de Mello, and 'Everything Belongs' by Richard Rohr. They have been great companions for the journey.

There are two blessings which I love - one Jewish and one Celtic; I wish them upon all who read this:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you his peace."
Numbers 6: 24-26

"May the road rise to meet you,
may the wind be always at your
back, may the sun shine warm
upon your face, and the rain fall
soft upon your fields, and until we
meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of his hand."
Celtic Blessing

I can identify with Anthony de Mello:

I am satisfied to do my thing, to dance my dance ... and have done with it. According to a nice sentence I read somewhere, 'A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.' I am content to sing my song, even though often the whole thing seems meaningless."

Anthony de Mello: We Heard the Bird Sing, p71

Michelle Le Morvan, January 2009

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Cerys

Christian Spirituality continuously ripples and vibrates through me. I have the voices of the prophets Jeremiah, Elijah, Nathan, Amos, and the Isaiahs (all three). The music of the Psalms has framed my experience. The Gospels of Luke and Matthew, including the Beatitudes, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Parable of the Sower frequently emerge in my consciousness. One of Europe's greatest musical dramatists, steeped in Protestant ideas, JS Bach, inspires me, via organ music; the St Matthew Passion and the wonderful cantatas. Purcell's funeral music from the 1662 Prayer Book and heart-rending motets, such as "Remember not..." are deep in my heart. So Christian spirituality is an essential part of my being. On Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, I was at Festal Evensong for St Matthias in Kings College Chapel, Cambridge.

And yet the numinous ultimate reality, the realm of eternal light and life, is accessed by different cultural routes and wavelengths.

Increasingly I find that Pure Land Buddhism, inspired in part by the Japanese monks Honen and Shinran, and the Sutras (scriptures) used in this tradition, speak to me most powerfully. The focal figure in this faith tradition is Amida (Buddha) and she is eternal light and life-giver. In this tradition, we are regarded as foolish beings and the chant in faith "Namo Amida Bu" accesses divine eternal reality. Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; of whom shall I fear," could equally well be "Amida is my light and salvation."

The Psalm, "As pants the hart for cooling streams, so longs my heart for thee" could equally well be for Amida. In Faure's Requiem, "Luceat" and "Luceat Eternam" are dominant words; "Light" and "Eternal Light," which equally well describe the realm of ultimate reality in Pure Land Buddhism.

Will Christianity in the 21st century continue as paranoid, neurotic, superior siege mentality, an ark of salvation to which everyone else is regarded as inferior, in error and even wicked? - Or simply a localised, culturally specific ideological and institutional form to access ultimate reality, amongst other geographically and culturally formed access routes? Christianity has been described as there for others, without necessarily insisting on membership. Jesus, in his encounter by the well with the Samaritan woman in a different and culturally despised religious variant, was simply engaged in compassion and spiritual wisdom. Is this not the model for us?

So if I put down on a form "Religion – Pure Land Buddhist" now, and want my funeral to be to a Pure Land Buddhist rite, and in a hospital ask for the Buddhist chaplain, I do not feel that I am denying my roots to Christian spirituality at all. In and under the tree of ultimate reality, Christianity ripples in my heart along with Buddhist language and religion.

THE HOLY FATHER AND GENDER THEORY

Jay

Last December you may remember that there was a big fuss when the Pope expressed his view that gays and transsexuals posed a bigger threat to the planet than global warming. I first heard this on the radio and thought, "Silly old man", then got cross. My next reaction was to think how flattering that I posed a bigger problem than global warning. Wow - now that's power.

I wanted to find out what he actually said. Most reporting of the sayings of the great of the church is way off beam; journalists pick on the sensational, even if it wasn't said. What did the man really say? Funnily enough, none of the papers reported it and *The Church Times*, which I waited for eagerly, gave it not a mention.

As far as I can make out, it was more of an attack on Gender Theory. There seems to have been no specific mention of either homosexuals or transsexuals but we all know that the Holy Father is not accepting. The target appears to have been gender theory and the equalising of the sexes. Here I find myself more in sympathy.

I have listened over many years to many arguments about sex and about gender with people trying to convince others that these things don't really matter and that there is convergence and almost congruence. This doesn't speak to me. We know that sex and gender operates in a U shape with the two arms representing respectively male and female with a coming together at the base of the U. This seems a good representation but the transgender world concentrates overmuch on the coming together. It tends to dismiss too lightly the vast bulk of the population which is clearly on the arms of the U and which has no difficulty in thinking of itself as male or female.

We tend to have an emphasis that sex and gender are two very different things. Well, yes, they are different but are very closely entwined. For the vast majority of people there is no difference. Sex might relate to the plumbing and gender to the social role but, like the horse and cart, one tends to go with the other. Perhaps transsexuals are the exception which proves the rule.

My thinking is that whilst gender might be one thing, sex plays a vital part in determining the gender role. Sex is crucial, and this much of the transsexual world seems keen to ignore or play down. This is unreal. For human beings sex is very important indeed. Consider just three aspects of sex:-

1. Men impregnate women. Women menstruate, gestate and lactate.
2. Men are stronger than women. This has led to the subjugation of women; men have always used that strength to get their own way. Even with increasing civilisation and better awareness among men, domestic violence still affects one in three women.
3. Women have a biological clock.

These three aspects of sex determine the behaviour of men and, to a greater degree, the behaviour of women, and have a huge impact on the gender role that each has within society. Whilst much of gender behaviour is socially determined, it has its basis in physicality. As a simple example, I am very much more careful of my personal safety now than I ever was as a man. My route home on dark nights is carefully planned with safety in mind.

I was talking deeply with a young woman recently. She said that she had been desperate to have babies and there is little doubt that she would have made an excellent mother. Now she thought the chances had probably disappeared and that maybe now that she was older, perhaps it was as well. Her attitude had coloured her relationships and perhaps had been the cause of their failure. She is 37. What man would think like that or behave accordingly?

It may be argued that the many differences between men and women, and there are so many, are clear enough but actually cannot be scientifically determined. True - most can't. Are women more nurturing of children? Yes, but there will be men who are equally so. Are men better at systems? Yes, but there will be women who are equally so. One can go on in this vein interminably. You can invoke the chromosome argument which again affects classification. Wherever you look, you know that women are different from men, but that there are cases where that difference is so slim that it cannot be measured. *Vive la difference*. The problem is that we have got used to things being scientifically determined, usually by repeatable experiments in laboratories. For some matters this simply doesn't work. That the scientists can't find the repeatable experiment does not prove that there is no difference.

There must be sympathy for those seeking a convergence for themselves or perhaps even androgyny. Each has to find their individual way forward. Nor would I wish to downplay the intention of trying to right the balance between the sexes; here Gender Theory has helped. One cannot possibly condone the patriarchy, which affects so much of human organisation, including very obviously the Catholic Church. Much has been achieved and much remains to be achieved. However the fact is that male and female are not the same, and most of the world accepts the male female divide as natural.

Here I think is where the Holy Father went wrong. The Catholic Church displays good sense in deriving much of its belief from natural order. If things are this way, they probably are this way. In this lies hope. On the other hand the protestant churches base their beliefs on scripture and this leaves no room for hope. The Holy Father hasn't looked hard enough. Most of the rules have exceptions and this too is Nature's way. He has to learn that these exceptions are real and equally natural. Homosexuality occurs in many species, not all of whom can be considered sinful. Transsexualism occurs in species other than Man. Transsexuals, few as they are, are real. When that realisation dawns in the Catholic Church, we might be moving on.

~ O ~

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

A man was being tailgated by a stressed-out driver as they made their way through the gridlock on a busy main road. Suddenly, the light turned red just in front of him. He did the right thing, stamping on the brake and stopping at the junction, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through. The woman had just had a major argument with her partner; she was furious, honked her horn, and screamed in frustration at the delay to her journey. She dropped her mobile phone and makeup and yelled again at the driver in front.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to get out of the car, and arrested her on suspicion.

He took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a holding cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, 'I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, mouthing off to the driver in front of you, and swearing at him.'

"I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' tax disc holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' window sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the boot-lid."

"Naturally...I assumed you had stolen the car."



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at



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FISHING

Three priests on their day off, borrowed a small boat and went fishing on the lake.

At about ten o'clock, one priest asked, "Who's hungry?" They all voted for a snack; he got out of the boat and walked on the water to the shore, returning ten minutes later with some coffee and croissants.

At about one o'clock, one of the others asked, "Who's hungry?" They all voted for lunch; he got out of the boat and walked on the water to the shore, returning ten minutes later with coffee and sandwiches.

At about four o'clock, the third one asked, "Who's hungry?" They all voted for afternoon tea; he got out of the boat and sank into the water.

The first priest asked, "Didn't he see the stepping stones?"

The second priest asked, "What stepping stones?"

~ O ~



The reading had been taken from the
Book of Maccabees



THE SIBYLS
Christian Spirituality Group
for transgendered people

Mrs Susan Withers
97 Bedford Street
Crewe
CW2 6JB

Tel: 01270-250207

WEEKEND AT St Deiniol's Library, Harwarden, near Chester
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Name

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address above, ASAP***