



SIBYLS NEWS

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

www.sibyls.co.uk E-mail: info@sibyls.co.uk

...my eyes have seen your Salvation, which you have prepared in the
sight of all nations:
a Light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke 2: 30-32

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.*

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

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.

OUR RULE

Members must respect the security of each and every other member, and must never jeopardise that security.

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

All who are contemplating or recovering from surgery, and those struggling with transition.

All those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires.

All those known to us who are in any kind of need,
and those with disabilities or who are suffering from physical or emotional pain.

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Rosie tells me that some Newsletters, both posted and emailed, have been undeliverable. I realise that the Newsletter may well be a lifeline for some people, but to avoid waste,

**Please do keep me informed of changes of contact details.**

You can contact me at: [hjmathier.24@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hjmathier.24@tiscali.co.uk) or on 0115 9226450

Thank you to all who help to keep cost down by receiving the Newsletter by email.  
Please let me know if you would like to receive your copy by email.

We will still send a paper version if you prefer.

Please note that views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or of Sibyls in general.

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Helen's thoughts

Well, this is my first Newsletter: have I taken on too much? Time will tell.

Thank you Rosie, for your work over the last two years: you will be a hard act to follow!

You will notice a few small changes in layout; more may follow, but I promise nothing alarming. Please feel free to make suggestions.

Rosie, active as ever, has sent details of a conference on gender and spirituality to be held next February. Sandra Moore offers some ideas on how people view "religion", and Yvonne tells her story of how she found fulfillment among the Quakers.

... and I offer a little from my own current spiritual journey.

But don't leave it up to others.

Please send in your contributions: your Newsletter couldn't exist without them.

I had hoped to take a group to Whalley Abbey next autumn, and had made a provisional booking on the basis of the price quoted. However, next year's group price is higher: too high for us, and I have reluctantly decided not to confirm the booking. If any members would like an informal weekend, we could arrange for a few of us to go. It's well worth a visit: the accommodation is excellent and the current B+B prices please are quite reasonable. Take a look: www.whalleyabbey.co.uk

I'm hoping to go back myself at some time next year. Do let me know if you're interested. A happy and blessed Christmas to you all, and a peaceful and fulfilled New Year.

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### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

|                                                            |                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Friday 17 <sup>th</sup> – Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2013 | Whalley Hall, Whalley Bridge, Derbyshire          |
| Friday 16 <sup>th</sup> – Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2014 | The Windermere Centre, Windermere, Cumbria        |
| <i>Autumn 2014</i>                                         | <i>St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire</i> |

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REGULAR MEETINGS

LONDON a few members gather on the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 for a Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by a meal together.

The last meeting in 2012 is 13th December, and dates for 2013 are 14th February, 11th April, 13th June, 8th August, 10th October and 12th December.

MANCHESTER events in the North-West and North Wales are organised by Jenny-Anne jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk and Elen elen.heart@btinternet.com.

OTHER INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Metropolitan Community Church's throughout the world embrace diversity.

In the UK there are churches in North London, South London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Dorchester, Torbay, Bath and Newcastle. See ufmcc.com/ for details.

CARDIFF City United Reform Church (www.cityurc.org.uk),

Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190, Sunday service at 10.30am.

BRIGHTON Dorset Gardens Methodist Church (www.dgmc.org.uk), Dorset Gardens, Brighton, BN2 1RL, 01273 605 502.

OXFORD St Columba's United Reformed Church (www.saintcolumbas.org/), Alfred Street, Oxford, OX1 4EH, Sunday service at 10.45

EXETER Southernhay United Reformed Church (www.southernhaychurch.org/), Dix's Field, Exeter, EX1 1QA, Sunday service at 10.30am.

LONDON St Luke's Parish Church (www.chelseaparish.org/), Sydney Street, London, SW3 6NH, 020 7351 7365.

St James, Piccadilly (www.st-james-piccadilly.org/),

St James's Church 197 Piccadilly London W1J 9LL / 020 7734 4511

Soho Masses (www.sohomasses.com/), Church of the Assumption & St Gregory, Warwick Street, London, W1B 5NB

Many other inclusive churches may be found by going to the Inclusive Church website (www.inclusivechurch2.net/) and clicking on Churches.

Please do let me know of any other inclusive or welcoming Churches and I will do my best to include details in future Newsletters.

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### **SIBYLS LISTENING SERVICE**

People prepared to listen to others are one of God's greatest gifts to us. We are fortunate in having some members who are happy to listen to you and chat with you. Please remember that we are not trained to give advice – but a problem shared in confidence often seems less of a burden. The listening service really does work so if you want someone with whom to talk with, why not call one of the following volunteers?

|              |               |                   |               |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Jenny Bond   | 01623 836 662 | Jane Bowles       | 01492 660 147 |
| Carol Moore  | 01625 858 487 | Jenny-Anne Bishop | 01745 337 144 |
| Helen Mather | 0115 922 6450 | Jay Walmsley      | 020 8763 0146 |

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THE MOSES SYNDROME

Helen

Sometimes God will surprise us by taking us places we never expected. Sometimes he'll show us something new we'd never considered. Sometimes he'll ask us to do things we'd never even imagined.

Recently I believe he's shown me the possibility of a new way of serving him. If it works, it will indeed be full-time service. But it's something I'd never thought of, and I suspect most of my church wouldn't: I believe he is asking me to consider going into a convent!

I knew little of the Religious Life: I've since heard it said that it is the Anglican church's best-kept secret. I can well believe it. There had been a few background hints, but it was in July, when four of us from my cathedral choir sang at the dedication of a local community's new home, that I started to make sense of them. Oddly, in so different an environment (for a life-long evangelical!), I felt quite at ease.

I don't feel uncomfortable about the idea: it's so off my radar that I wasn't shocked. And I found a few days' stay with this community a gentle, eye-opening experience. A friend of mine, a fellow-singer and an oblate of a community in the south of England, has given me an old Daily Office book, which I've tried to use regularly. It's certainly given my otherwise completely haphazard prayer life some structure.

So now for some serious exploration. Wrong! And here's where Moses comes in.

My gender history is no problem, but my age is: I'm far too old!

I can understand the concept of a "life vocation" being just that, and I can see how younger members will guarantee a community's stability, but I'm sure a committed and unattached older person can bring valuable life experiences to a community. Others I have spoken to agree. I know there may be a few communities who take candidates in their sixties, but I'll have to search very hard indeed.

Of course there are alternatives, and maybe I'll find contentment with a lesser commitment, but I'd like to research all the possibilities before deciding. I've lots of work to do, and not so much time to do it in. Maybe I won't have the persistence: I'm easily discouraged. But if it's right for me, it will happen.

Or if not, God will show me exactly where he does want me. And it will be right for me.

After all, if he could use Moses... And **he** was eighty!

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## **GENDER VARYING FAITH**

*Rosie*

I have been representing Sibyls as a committee member of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality (CSCS) for a few years now and have been able to bring a greater understanding of gender variance to both committee and the wider membership.

For the first time, the CSCS annual conference next year will focus on gender variance under the title 'Gender Varying Faith – exploring gender variance, identity and religious belief (see [christianityandsexuality.org/?p=922](http://christianityandsexuality.org/?p=922)). Several members of Sibyls will be contributing to the conference with two keynote speakers in the morning and a wider panel discussion in the afternoon. The conference will be held at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho from 10.30am to 4pm on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

Final details for the conference have still to be decided but if you are interested in attending please let me know by email at [rosie@sibyls.co.uk](mailto:rosie@sibyls.co.uk) or call me on 01425 270 540 and I will keep you informed.

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FINDING MYSELF THROUGH THE QUAKER WAY

Yvonne

It is time to write something for the newsletter. Rosie, and Jay before her, have done so well to make a newsletter that gives me a sense of connection, even though I hardly ever make it to get-togethers. There were two things in newsletter 62 that prompted me. Firstly, the notes of Sibyls Together at Windermere said that those of other faiths were always welcome. As a Quaker I have been grateful for Sibyls, glad to be able to join in worship and sharing, even though I am unfamiliar with Anglican ways. Secondly, I was moved by Deirdre's heartfelt article about offering feminine, caring service yet being prevented from giving expression to her real self. The experience of the TV isolated by circumstances.

Realising my feminine side and embracing my ambiguous gender identity has been both joyful and problematic. I live with the certain knowledge of my condition. Yet, like many of us, that fact and the secrecy that accompanied it for some time has damaged my relationship with my wife and challenges my marriage.

Realising my feminine self is the one thing that has really deepened my spiritual life. My other motivations to worship were creative gifts, social conscience and an upbringing steeped in Methodism. These brought me to attending Quaker meetings off and on over some years, drawn to the 'waiting in the light' approach to worship. Facing up to and accepting my feminine side went hand-in-hand with my commitment to membership of my Quaker meeting. My gender revelation enabled a spiritual openness I had missed before.

While transsexuals are definite in their true identity, as a transvestite I am equivocal, in-between: uncertainty and ambiguity seems to be an integral part of my experience. This uncertainty is not a firm foundation for going public but is a basis for prayer, contemplation and worship, for being open to God. I have come to realise my gender-mix is a constant part of my identity, as is my spirituality. Quakers are famously tolerant but while I have chosen not to reveal my transgender self, I take my whole self to worship without embarrassment or anxiety. I have been enriched by my own sense of the feminine in the divine and I do not accept conventional male images of God.

I have just read a personal story which I related to more than most things I have read. 'Who am I, really?' by Andrea Summers in the Beaumont Trust's 'Trans in the 21st Century', is the only account I have read that describes accepting her female self as a spiritual exploration, something that has amazed me in my own experience.

Why Quakers? In our day to day lives and in silent worship, Quakers seek to experience God directly, by waiting and listening. We have no minister leading worship, anyone can offer ministry to the meeting. Despite the simplicity of the meeting for worship, it takes time to understand the discipline and power of silent worship. Quakerism is founded upon Christianity - the Inward Light is the Light of Christ, but Quakers, or Friends, find their own sense of God.

The Quaker testimonies on truth, simplicity, equality and peace – all have their origins in the earliest Quaker times. 'One of the consequences of our equality testimony is that we welcome lesbian, gay and bisexual and transgendered men and women, and have a fundamental commitment to equality and inclusion'.

One of our 'advices' says, 'Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.'

'For a Quaker, religion is ... an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self... it must take into account the whole of our humanity: our attitudes to other human beings in our most intimate as well as social and political relationships... there is no part of ourselves and of our relationships where God is not present'

I have seen that through Changing Attitude and the LGBT Anglican Coalition the Anglican Church has great energy to inform and influence. Despite its embracing all humanity and its pioneering of same sex marriage, Quakers are less active regarding transgender. The Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship provides a support network, even though it does not make trans explicit in the name. There are moves afoot to change this.

I do believe Quakers can bring something distinctive to broadening awareness of transgendered lives. In particular, to express transvestism as a permanent, enlightened state of being, not simply an occasional furtive recreation, and to be aware of the incredible stresses many transgendered people carry with them.

All have private lives that need not be trumpeted, but I do have a particular concern with the Quaker testimony to truth and the way transvestites tend to weave a web of secrecy and deception around loved ones. This joyful aspect of my life, as well as the tensions it has caused with my partner, should really be shared and upheld by loving Friends and turned into positive reaching out. The Quaker 'Meeting for Clearness' offers a means for sensitive, confidential and prayerful revelation and loving support.

In considering personal gender journey's, transvestism and truthfulness, openness and privacy, I have found myself using the term 'true-gender' in preference to transgender – because we are what we are and this term seems more celebratory. However difficult it is to dress, however awkward my relationships, however sceptical I am, I take comfort in my true gender.

~~~oOo~~~

A gay priest I know said one day, (he is a chaplain to students), *"if I tell people I am gay they say, 'So what?', but if I say I am a Christian, they become uncomfortable"*.

What exactly does this say to us?

I have rarely found; maybe others find different, that someone who is gay bisexual or trans takes this fact lightly or as a matter of little account. In fact I think probably most LGBT people take this aspect of their lives very, very seriously indeed.

Surely it's right to say also that being LGBT is not a matter of 'choice' in the usually accepted sense of the word; 'choice' as in the selection of options or choosing one thing on a supermarket shelf in contrast to something else. I am fairly sure that although some people may feign nonchalance about their 'LGBT-ness', it is just that, a feigning.

I mean we all can probably think of the results which seem inevitably to follow for those who try to *suppress* in the name of a creed or set of ideas their natural tendencies.

On the other hand, considering the average attitude to religious life in the educated west or where its influence is strong, we find a strange contrast. We hear of people with a religious bent leaving one religion, say Catholic, and becoming another for a while, say protestant, Buddhist, Moslem or even adopting agnostic positions.

In fact it seems that for many, *religion* has become an affair of the supermarket shelf. One can try a religion on for size to see how it fits.

True there still are fundamentalists and fanatics but usually it is easy enough to see undigested psychological experiences at the root of those, as it is in the people who rail against LGBT people in certain churches etc. They are hung up on certain ideas.

But if we take a slightly more historical view, something interesting emerges. Take the case of Jesus.

It would be easy enough to feel that Jesus was disliked by the powers that be in his time because he offended certain customs and ideas or generally created a kind of turbulence in the empire. But really, as we know from our own world, the excuses given as pretexts for the exclusion or condemnation of someone are rarely the real reasons. Breaking the Sabbath by plucking corn or healing the sick are actually more like symptoms of something underlying than actual causes.

It is possible that at the beginning Mohammed also experienced something similar with the banu Quraysh; or Socrates with the Athenians; they did not quite feel right about him somehow .they did not *fit*. But this was not primarily a question of ideas but of something much deeper.

It is an interesting fact that when ideas are at stake per se generally people do not fight or put each other to death. But when their life feels undermined or threatened they will. So fundamentally, using Jesus as representative of the other people mentioned, it was not a question of teaching being 'wrong' but of a deeper feeling about him. Jesus was 'not quite the thing.'

The fact that Jesus had 12 disciples surely was not a big problem in a culture of very intellectual Judaism? But the fact that Jesus was not married certainly was. The fact also that a Rabbi found it sensible to teach *women* and spend time with them was. That he met 'prostitutes' (we have to remember that the Jews had been in Babylon as captives where prostitution was by no means what we consider prostitution, but a kind of religious sexual art.) He was obviously affecting the conservative priesthood very uneasily. He did not even *look* right to be the Messiah of Israel: he was probably a blonde or fair Galilean as opposed to the dark Jewish appearance of the tribe of Judah.

The Romans also are interesting in this regard. In the Roman world existed the cult of the Galli. The word is related of course to 'Gaul' and also to 'Celt' and to 'Galatian'. The Galli

were a cult of religious people generally devoted to the practices which underly the myths of Atys or Adonis and Cybele. If one familiarises oneself with these one can see the point.

The Romans, say at the time of the Punic wars had a great horror of this cult and refused it in their home territory. But when Hannibal ravaged Italy and threatened Rome itself it was decided to consult the oracles in order to find some release from the threat.

The oracle informed them that they needed to change their attitude to the Galli and allow them into Rome, which in desperation they did - I recommend to those who do not know of this to read up about the Galli and about the myth concerned. These Galli were by no means impressed by a few ideas or belief systems but driven by something which probably today would be labeled obsession or madness: they would be classed as self-harmers.

The result was a certain change in fortune. Hannibal was defeated and Rome supplanted Carthage as leading power of the region but also changed its fundamental mores or outlook in fact the Roman world evolved. Roman consciousness moved forwards.

It is interesting that Carthage was a fundamentally Phoenician city and that the links remained between Palestine and that region in the persons of Jezebel the priestess and wife of Ahab and also Herodias.

The Jews and Romans shared a certain distaste for the cultic practices associated with the cultures of north Africa. And this gives us an interesting light upon the way Jesus was received by the imperial powers of Rome and by the Jewish priesthood. They felt an uncanny hatred for what Jesus was rather than disagreement with ideas or even his actions.

Maybe we can see every human being reflected in this account? 'Ecce Homo'.

Fundamentally human nature seems to me altogether like this. Something new, evolutionary comes up in us. Each of us is a new statement in cosmic terms so to speak. But around us at birth are the preconceptions and fears of our culture and environment. This culture and environment is by necessity of its nature conservative and dogmatic. In each of us heredity environment, culture, peer pressure and government will try to massacre the innocent and unborn in us. They can do no other.

But as adults where do we find this culture and environment and hereditary element which would chain us to the spot? In the last resort where is it but in we ourselves? We try to discipline and conform ourselves to the culture in order to gain acceptance and be successful; successful in conservative terms. Is it not so? Our ideas so often are ideas of tradition habit and second hand knowledge. Wiki-knowledge perhaps? We do not really need the police because by suggestion and hint we can be brought to police ourselves. In other words to snuff out the evolutionary 'Jesus' in ourselves.

I would therefore like to ask *Where then does it come from, this strange contradiction to social habits and strictures that leads someone to challenge, overthrow or revise their conception of their very self that we see among other examples, in the LGBT world?* And where should we look for the conservatism which might do the equivalent in this case to that deed performed by Constantine the great when he regularised and normalised the Catholic church? What force is it that would organize and control the 'something' that is coming to birth in us?

~~~oOo~~~

What, no funnies this time? No-one sent any in! 🤖 It's up to you...

~~~oOo~~~



# THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People



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## WEEKEND AT Whaley Hall, Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire Friday 17<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Name .....

Single/twin room (delete as appropriate) .....


Name of other occupant .....


Willing to share with .....

Address .....

.....

.....

 Telephone .....

 Email .....

Please reserve the following number of places .....

|                          |                                             |                |       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|
| <i>Full weekend</i>      | <i>Friday night to Sunday lunch</i>         | <i>£125.00</i> | ..... |
| <i>24 hour overnight</i> | <i>afternoon to lunch</i>                   | <i>£ 60.00</i> | ..... |
| <i>Day visitor</i>       | <i>all meals.</i>                           | <i>£ 30.00</i> | ..... |
|                          | <i>Lunch or evening meal and tea/coffee</i> | <i>£ 20.00</i> | ..... |

*If you are not coming for the full weekend please specify the dates/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? .....

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

**Please send this form with your cheque to Helen Mather, address above**