



Issue No. 73 Sept 2015

May the power of your love, Lord Christ
fiery and sweet as honey,
so absorb our hearts as to withdraw them from all that is
under heaven.
Grant that we may be ready to die for love of your love,
as you died for love of our love. Amen (St.Francis)



St. Matthew—feast day Sept 21

Matt 9:9 As

Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post.

He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples.

The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

He heard this and said,

"Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, *I desire mercy, not sacrifice*.

I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

The

statue of St. Matthew by Camillo Rusconi in the Vatican.

CONTENTS

This time there is a lot to read, and not many pictures. Even the lighter moments have been squeezed. If you want further information about any of the shorter references, please ask me.

Advance expressions of interest in next year's events can be registered with me if you wish. Carol

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THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

c/o 10, Ffordd Las, Rhyl, LL18 2DY

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

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

Sibyls seek to fulfil the two great commandments of Jesus: To love God and love one another. To achieve this we provide opportunities to meet in safe and friendly establishments. We promote the freedom to talk, to learn, to pray and to seek God's will.

If you are having difficulties reconciling your faith with being transgendered or are concerned about acceptance in your church then maybe Sibyls is what you have been looking for.

It could be that you just need to talk with fellow Christians who understand what it is to be transgendered, or simply wish to be yourself as you worship in fellowship and in a safe environment.

We also like to know of churches which welcome transgender people. Also if you would like more information to give to your church please do contact us.

We welcome new members, young and old. There is no membership fee or annual subscription, and no commitment, except confidentiality. Your details are held in total confidence and will not be given to any other members without your permission.

To contact us in confidence, either write to us or send us an email. enquiries@sibyls.co.uk

New Sibyls Website - Please check out the new Sibyls Website, which is available on www.sibyls.co.uk

There is also a member's section for which a Username and password is required. **The username and password will be updated with each issue of the Newsletter.** The current username is SibylsSite (all one word) The password is Members2See

Forthcoming Sibyls events:

St.Anne's, Soho - Susan

The remaining planned dates for 2015 are **October 8; December 10.**

Sibyls' Reflective Day 24th October 2015. please see page 3 & 4 for **Programme and Booking Form to print off**

Couples Weekend - Elaine - no dates confirmed Elaine has found someone who could be a moderator for the Couples Weekend. This person was principal of Salisbury College: A possible location is Holy Rood House but others are being considered. The weekend will be for about 12 people.

Windermere - booked for 13th - 15th May 2016

Hilfield Priory - booked for 28 - 30th October 2016

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining the commandment to 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' she asked, 'Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?'

Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, 'Thou shall not kill..'



Sybils' Reflective Day 24th October 2015.

At the Sisters of St Andrew, Lewisham.

"My Body was Made for the Love of God" (Ernesto Cardenal)

A day of reflection on how the bodies we inhabit relate to our lives as beloved children of God.

The Day will be led by the Revd. Simon Buckley, Rector of St Anne's Soho.

10.00-10.30 Coffee

10.30 Welcome and Introductions.

10.45-12.15 Session 1

12.15-12.45 Eucharist (Anglican)

13.00-14.00 Lunch

14.00-15.00 Session 2

15.00-15.30 Tea

15.30-16.30 Session 3

16.30 Closing thoughts and Evening Prayer

18.30 Optional Evening Meal in a Local Restaurant*

*There may be an opportunity to join the Sisters of St Andrew during their evening service at 18:30. If this is the case we would go for the meal after the worship.

Booking Form for the Day is on the next page. The suggested donation for the day is £25-£35. Includes Lunch.
Please give as much as you can.

Please note that no one should be deterred from coming if they cannot afford this.

Limited Overnight Accommodation on the Friday and Saturday Nights is available with the Sisters of St Andrew.

IF YOU WANT TO STAY OVERNIGHT YOU MUST BOOK AND PAY SEPARATELY FOR OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATION

<http://www.sisters-of-st-andrew.com/index1.html>

Overnight accommodation has to be booked SEPARATELY and directly with the Sisters of St Andrew. The accommodation is self-catering only but very comprehensive kitchen facilities are provided. There are also plenty of restaurants in the area. The accommodation is available on a first come first served basis. Booking details and information on the overnight accommodation are on the sibyls and Sisters of St Andrew websites. The Sisters of St Andrew ask for donations to cover the cost of overnight and day accommodation. For an overnight stay (Friday and/or Saturday night) your suggested donation for the accommodation, per person per night to the Sisters is: £25-40

The Sisters of St Andrew

The Welcome

99 Belmont Hill

Lewisham

London

SE13 5DY

Tel:0208 852 1662

e-mail: welcome@sisters-of-st-andrew.com

In addition do not forget to book separately for the day as well!

A booking form can be printed off from next page.

If you require more information please contact Susan Gilchrist at: sgen4144@gmail.com

Sybils' Reflective Day 24th October 2015.
At The Sisters of St Andrew, Lewisham.
"My Body was Made for the Love of God" (Ernesto Cardenal)

BOOKING FORM:

Please print out and send the completed form with your donation to:
"Sibyls Day Meeting", 8 Greenways Drive, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 5DU.

Your Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Post code: Telephone:

E-mail:

Dietary Requirements

Will you be staying for the meal in a local restaurant on the Saturday evening?

Are You a Member of the Sibyls?

THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

The suggested donation for this event is £25-£35. (Includes lunch). Please give as much as you can.

Please note that no one should be deterred from coming if they cannot afford this.

Please make cheques payable to "Mr P. A. Raftery - The Sibyls"
For catering purposes please book at least 15 days in advance.

I enclose a donation for this event of £

Your booking is provisional until we have received this form (completed), with your donation. If you require confirmation, please tick the box on the right and we will send you confirmation to your e-mail address above or else please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

☐

Limited Overnight Accommodation on the Friday and Saturday Nights is available with the Sisters of St Andrew. This must be SEPARATELY booked.

PLEASE NOTE that overnight accommodation has to be booked directly with the Sisters of St Andrew. Accommodation is self-catering only but very comprehensive kitchen facilities are provided. There are also plenty of restaurants in the area. The accommodation is available on a first come first served basis. Details are on the Sibyls website at

<http://www.gndr.org.uk/sibyls5/headlines/SuF0508b-SibylsStAndrewDayCosts.htm>
or follow the website links.



St. Francis' Prayer before the San Damiano Crucifix

Most High and glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart.

Give me true faith, certain hope, and a perfect love.

Give us a sense of the divine and knowledge, knowledge of yourself,

so that we may do everything in fulfilment of your holy will



An excerpt from Francis' Canticle of the Creatures

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and bears the likeness of You, Most High One.

MY IMPRESSIONS of the Hilfield Weekend

Pauline

It may not have been a cold coming we had of it but it certainly was a slow and long one, through the endless roads South, clogged and choked by bank holiday traffic. Bless Philippa who patiently endured all the driving. Even Stonehenge, as we crawled past, failed to cast much of a spell. Yet it was a gateway it seemed as finally we left the main road and entered leafy, sunken lanes leading...where? We entered a farmyard and doubted for a moment, pressed on and behold we had arrived at what from the first moment was clearly a refuge, haven and sanctuary, an impression reinforced by much-needed food being made available for waylaid travellers.

As a neophyte I had no idea what to expect either from Hilfield or from my fellow Sibyls. I immediately felt entirely at home with both. The surroundings were peaceful and beautiful and the spring air as mild and gentle as the Franciscan spirituality that felt so pervasive and healing with just a hint of austerity in the simple liturgy in the unadorned chapel and plain fare in the refectory (although I believe the self-caterers may have fared rather better...).

If I didn't already know, it was obvious as soon as Carol began her valiant attempt to impose order on the discussion on Saturday morning about sustainability and the environment that it was going to be a very lively weekend. Whatever else they are, Sibyls are not short of opinions or the desire to express them freely and forcibly! It was a relief in a way to be taken outside on a guided tour by a delightful young American member of the community and to marvel at the effort being made by the whole community to live a simple and sustainable lifestyle. It did make me think of all the ways in which my own life is in need of pruning back to something more basic and natural.

Then we had Tina's wonderful workshop on gender, sexuality and spirituality. As someone who has had a long and hard struggle to understand and integrate all 3 elements into something remotely coherent, I found this extraordinarily enlightening. I am so grateful to my fellow Sibyls for allowing themselves to be vulnerable and exposed in profoundly personal areas and enabling me to do the same.

Now....the bit I was not looking forward to! I am blessed with 2 left feet and am hopelessly uncoordinated so dancing is really not my thing. I did though enjoy putting on a party frock and just about survived the ordeal without too much disgrace.

If I had to highlight one thing, it would be the Eucharist led by Tina in the chapel on Sunday morning. It did not matter that we came from different traditions and denominations, being united in a simple and moving ceremony in which we administered Christ to one another. Tina preached beautifully and inspiringly, reminding us that while God transcends gender, it is permissible to regard the Holy Spirit as a she! He or She or It, the Spirit was truly there amongst us and it was a privilege to be celebrating Pentecost at Hilfield with the Sibyls. On a personal note, it grieved me more than ever to think that my own Church will not even ordain women.

It remains to say that one of the joys of the weekend was the many conversations I enjoyed with other Sibyls. I want to thank them all for their readiness to talk so openly and fearlessly and for all the support and encouragement I received from them. And special thanks to Philippa who had to put up with me all the way back oop North (or civilisation as it's known up here!).

Carol has asked us to give some individual thoughts on the weekend. My mind turned to doing it by what I liked and what I didn't like. Here goes.

I liked:-

- Being at the Friary, joining in for the weekend, feeling a part of it.
- Attending the Friary offices. Monastic rhythm is peaceful and comfortable which I really enjoyed.
- Eating with the community (six friars and about twenty volunteers). It was interesting to talk with them. The food was fine, I never went hungry.
- The location. The Friary is situated in a gorgeously beautiful valley.
- Meeting up again with other Sibyls. Good to catch up.
- The obvious fact that Sibyls still has a purpose in enabling people going through similar problems to meet and talk together.
- The look on a brother's face when he very kindly asked if we had a priest for our communion service and I said that there were several in our group.
- The Irish dancing.
- The wonderfully rich insect life.



I didn't like:-

- The four way segregation of the group into those eating with the community and those self catering, and those attending the Friary offices and those not.
- A slight feeling of unease about a community of deeply committed fresh faced young people who could only get out of the place once a fortnight. You quickly realise that before tarmac roads, Dorchester would have been a good day's walk away, probably still is. No bus.
- The location. The Friary is in the middle of nowhere and takes some finding. It is also a long way to travel, especially in heavy traffic.
- The sad fact that Sibyls is still needed to enable people going through similar problems to meet and talk together.



My Reaction to Hilfield

Tina

Hilfield Friary is tucked away, hidden almost, no signs on the main roads to guide you to it, and hence it has remained unspoiled, an oasis of prayer and peace set in an area of outstanding natural beauty - a perfect setting for a wonderful Sibyls weekend. Under-girded by the Franciscan community's round of prayer and communal meals (with extra treats to be found in Juniper House where the self-catering Sibyls hung out) the weekend had its own gentle rhythm with a colloquium on green issues, a tour of Hilfield's vegetable and fruit gardens, a relaxed, interactive version of the Sibyls workshop 'Gender, sexuality and spirituality', hilarious dancing, a Pentecost Eucharist with the Community (optional), concluding in the open air, a two-part Sibyls Together, sandwiching the Sibyls Pentecost Communion, final meal and photo. To quote the motto of St Francis of Assisi, 'Pax et bonum' - peace and the good.



Trancestors in the Bible by The Rev. Chris Dowd

Introduction

This is the first of two short essays based on my thesis exploring two different places of inspiration and affirmation for transfolk in the Bible. This article explores how the biblical eunuch can be used to claim a place for transfolk within the biblical text.

What Trans theologians say

Lewis Reay considers biblical eunuchs to be his “transcestors”(Reay 2009:157). As he writes:

Let me introduce you to some of my spiritual transcestors...Mehuman, the faithful, Hegai, the Eunuch....Harbona, the ass driver and Biztha, the booty, all eunuchs of King Xerxes.... (Reay, 2009:150)

Reay defines the term transcestor as “the elision of Trans and ancestor those transgender characters and people who provide a history and prove we have always been there”. (Reay 2009:149).

Trans theologians Tanis (2003), Mollenkott (2007), Reay (2009) and Kolakowski (1997) all make a connection between biblical eunuchs and transfolk. Each of them use a piece of scripture to make their point.

Tanis (2003:72), Reay (2009:151) and Mollenkott (2007:136) all make parallels between Jesus’ discussion of eunuchs in Matthew 19 and modern transfolk. They all conclude that the discussion of eunuchs in Matthew 19 and particularly in verse 19:12 (where Jesus mentions eunuchs who are made by others) is a direct and clear analogy between the eunuchs who are being discussed and themselves. The affirmation they find in the words of Jesus is clear within their writings.

Kolakowski also explores the implications of welcome for transgendered people within the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Kolakowski 1997) and the Eunuchs of Queen Jezebel (Kolakowski 2000). In her discussion of the Ethiopian Eunuch she concludes that the radical act of inclusion of a transcestor counters any biblically based objection that members of congregations may wish to make against the inclusion and welcome of transfolk. In her discussion of the eunuchs of Queen Jezebel she uses the biblical analogy to explore the tensions between some parts of feminism and transfolk. She concludes that there is an anxiety that transfolk will act in ways that will destroy the women’s movement if they are permitted to join it just as the eunuchs betrayed the strong and proud Jezebel to her conquerors and caused her death.

It would seem that there are two good reasons to accept the analogy. Claiming eunuchs as transcestors provides both affirmation and acceptance. In the next section I will explore both.

Affirmation

There is a human need for us to be able to find our historical roots. This is particularly important for people have been made invisible, appropriated by others or been ignored in history. The eunuch offers a visible and identifiable transcestor located within the Bible. As Reay proudly claims:

“I am from those powerful gender variant souls whose line stretches throughout history”. (Reay, 2009:151).

The eunuch allows Reay, Mollenkott, Kolakowski, Tanis and others who make this identification to claim a place in Scripture that recognises and legitimises their existence and identity. It places them within the larger Christian story and reminds the wider church of their existence and their right to a place with

Christianity. Stories such as the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8, Jesus' discussion of the eunuch in Matthew 19 and the blessing from Isaiah 56 to the eunuchs, thus offer legitimacy, a history and an identity for transfolk within the biblical narrative.

These stories also provide a powerful counter narrative to the Trans negative theology that uses the Creation Stories of Genesis 1 and 2 to set up a binary, birth defined, essentialist gender system as God ordained. It also counters the often quoted prohibition against cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5.

Acceptance

Kolakowski (1997) uses the eunuch to make a plea for tolerance from the broader church. Her argument is that if eunuchs are blessed in scriptures such as Isaiah 56, then God approves of eunuchs. If transfolk are analogous to eunuchs, then God approves of them also. The logical conclusion of this argument is that if transfolk are approved of by God in Scripture, there are no grounds for modern Christians to exclude or persecute them. Indeed it is the role of the modern church to welcome and affirm them. Her logic is simple and elegant. For those who take scripture seriously and make the same links the inclusion of transfolk in the wider church community becomes a biblical principle to be followed. Her argument allows the church to offer welcome, affirmation and support to a community at the margins of the Christian experience.

Limitations of the analogy to consider: Buying into a medical model?

While I do not wish to be overly negative, I do have concerns about using eunuchs uncritically. The *eunuch = trans* analogy plays into a medicalised model of trans identity where surgical intervention is required to correct a physical problem (sic).

I am also concerned that this model also entirely misses the complex issues surrounding identity. It does not take into account the difficulties of constructing identity, the courage of following one's inner truths despite the obstacles, challenging the gendered assumptions of society or the psychological and spiritual challenges that are part of a gender journey.

I am also uncomfortable that it only includes those who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria by a panel of psychologists and have submitted themselves to medical intervention that have physically changed their gender. This negates the ability to self-name and self-define. It is a ceding of the power of self-definition and self-expression to others. It ignores the pre-operative, the gender queer and those happy in their gender expression without surgery or medical intervention.

As Stone (1992) comments in "The Empire Strikes Back", to limit the identification of the Trans identity to a medicalised category of post-op transsexuals ignores the richness and the variety of the Trans experience:

Concomitant with the dubious achievement of a diagnostic category is the inevitable blurring of boundaries as a vast heteroglossic account of difference, heretofore invisible to the "legitimate" professions, suddenly achieves canonization and simultaneously becomes homogenized to satisfy the constraints of the category..... Emergent polyvocalities of lived experience, never represented in the discourse but present at least in potential, disappear; the berdache and the stripper, the tweedy housewife and the mujerado, the mah'u and the rock star, are still the same story after all, if we only try hard enough. (Stone, 1992:133)

If we agree with Stone's argument, the richness of the spiritual experience and the challenge and insights that transfolk offer the church would also be significantly reduced with a focus on the physical. Vital insights around the spiritual journeys of transfolk could be lost if the eunuch was considered the only transcestor.

Guest (2006:248) argues that our understanding of the word *saris* (eunuch) is incomplete. There is no definitive proof that all eunuchs were castrated and it may have been a general term for 'servant'. Their role was certainly more than court officials and guardians of harems. They were officers in charge of armies and explorers as well. While it does seem eunuchs were in some way gender liminal characters, there is no clear understanding of the social or biological mechanisms that created their situation. Claiming eunuchs as transestors without completely understanding their societal context is problematic. It is impossible to be sure how far the analogy between transfolk and eunuchs can be taken, or indeed, if it is accurate at all, because we know too little about the eunuchs of biblical times to be certain.

The analogy also ignores the different societal contexts in which biblical eunuchs and modern transsexuals live. Directly comparing transfolk of the 21st century with Near-Eastern court officials in biblical times is a difficult comparison to justify. As Guest notes:

While tracing a transsexual or a trans ancestry to ancient times might be understandably popular and have strategic advantages, the very different constructions of gender and sexuality in different places and times seriously undermine such gestures. Certainly the application of Deuteronomy 22.5 to postmodern transsexuals would not have been envisaged by any ancient author (Guest, 2006:134).

The analogy also limits the identity to MTF (and may not be inclusive of FTM) since the biblical eunuchs are always presented as born male. This has the potential to exclude the experiences of the FTM community who often struggle with invisibility in comparison to the larger number and visibility of the MTF community.

Conclusion

I believe that whether folk accept the analogy of eunuchs in the Bible or not is a personal decision. For some transfolk, it may be important to own them and find strength and connection in their stories. For others it may simply reinforce the preoccupation with the physical rather than the spiritual and psychological journey that is part of transitioning gender.

But even if you completely reject eunuchs as transestors, the Bible is full of gender variant images; women are called brothers (Romans 14:10, 1 Cor 6:5-6,). We are all brides of Christ (Eph 5:25-27), all part of the one body (Eph 5:30), Paul writes of himself as a woman giving birth (Gal 4:19) and Galatians 3:28 asserts that there are no male or female but all are one in Christ Jesus. To those who say a binary gender is fixed and God ordained perhaps need to have another look at their Bibles.

Guest D. 2007. Deuteronomy. In Guest, Goss, West and Bonache. Eds. *Queer Bible commentary*. London: SCM Press, pp. 122–143.

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Kolakowski VS. 1997b. Towards a Christian ethical response to transsexual persons. *Theology and Sexuality*, 3(6), pp.10–31.

Kolakowski VS. 2000. Throwing a party. Patriarchy, gender and the death of Jezebel. In Goss, R & West M, Eds. *Take back the word: A queer reading of the Bible*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, pp.103–114.

Mollenkott V. 2007. *Omnigender: a trans-religious approach*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.

Reay L. 2009. Towards a transgender theology: que(e)rying the eunuchs. In L Isherwood & M Althaus-Reid, Eds. *Trans/Formations*. London: SCM Press, pp. 148–167.

Stone S. 2006. The empire strikes back: a post transsexual manifesto. In S Stryker & S Whittle, Eds. *The transgender studies reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 221–235.

Tanis J. 2003. *Trans-gendered: Theology, ministry and communities of faith*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.

Sibylline Spirituality - further thoughts by Sandra Moore

I tremendously appreciate Pauline Elanor Fleck's thoughtful and considered response to my short article in the edition before last. I think the essence of the issue between us might be summarized as "What does a religious life mean?" I don't believe much in verbal definitions, which tend to divide people, so I will attempt to characterize what I mean by "religious" by using some examples.

On June 17th Professor Brian Cox, spokesman for the scientific community in its relations to the public, came onto the 'Today' programme complaining that presenters on the air were insufficiently savvy with basic items of scientific knowledge. He maintained that every educated person of the modern world should be au fait at least with the fundamental tenets of science. These he claimed were as a minimum:

That everything in the universe consists of atoms.

That Darwin's theory of evolution is correct.

That the universe started in the Big bang a certain number of billions of years ago.

Previously he has explained to audiences also that "Consciousness and Ideas " and all that goes with them are located in the brain and are the product of chemical and electrical signals and reactions in the brain's matter.

To my mind, this shows us one version of the word "Religious". I consider this to be so because in such situations instruction is given by someone who asserts that the things he says are "True" or "Facts" which all people, beginning with children in school should be required to accept just as they stand. The majority of people today will grow into adulthood absorbing these 'facts' and in order to gain approval from science teachers, pass science exams, get suitable jobs etc and generally find their way into society, will subscribe to these statements and then see them often enough elucidated and presented in films television programmes and on computer screens in popularized programmes picturing :-

Outer Space x billion years ago with simulated colossal explosions; cartoon dinosaurs struggling to survive; diagrams of the brain with flashing lights indicating "thoughts"; and whirling electrons circling coloured blackberry shapes representing atoms. etc All of this is supposed to be 'fact'.

Professor Brian Cox is therefore a priest. He is a particle physicist and so he is "one who knows." His word is to be trusted and taken on authority. He was once a singer in a group. He is a 'nice guy' good looking and speaks well. Ideal for presenting what has to be called 'The Faith', but presented "democratically." He is just like you and me, a regular fun-loving guy, but he knows what we can't know and has been where we can't go and seen what we can't see except on TV. But we can trust him! He makes it nice and simple for us hoi poloi.

I reckon churchmen of old would give their eye teeth to have the range and means of influence available to the priests of science of today's world like "Cardinal Cox" of the BBC.

As to the statements which Brian Cox feels everyone should "know " ...or rather we might say "accept", what are they but statements from a catechism which will be examined, not by churchmen but by the GCSE examiners?!

How does all this differ from the societies which the "scientific enlightenment" claims to have replaced? Authoritarian and anti-democratic monarchies with their supporting church?

Well, of course, we are told that science of today is 'open to all' and its educational motto is 'think for yourself.' However at the same time we are told to believe that our thoughts and ideas are only *electrical and chemical responses, in the computer machine in our heads*; which makes it a bit questionable what "thinking for oneself" might actually mean.

Our civilisation has values and ways of being which it considers "right, normal, proper "and to be encouraged. These values are underpinned and rest upon what it considers to be "true facts" about existence which give us a way coming to a view about *who and what we are in the world and in our own skins*. Apparently these "facts" are the ones presented by Brian Cox. They show us how *colossal* the universe is thought of as being; what gigantic forces are involved in it and how puny and small mankind is within this mighty system. The cosmos is not any longer the heaven world of God and the angels as the ancient world saw it but a vast soulless machine of forces originating in an explosion. Mankind is, we are told, only a tiny grub on a tiny rock at the edge of this vast machine. Organisms on this rock are engaged in a colossal war to survive in order to enjoy for a brief flash of time something they call "a life"; which amounts to nothing in the great span of aeons. Their life is more or less like a tiny flicker in the vastness.

This set of ideas are as prof. Cox explains the key dogmas of our modern world. But he doesn't use that word of course. They are there: constituting what he likes to call our "monkey cage." This is our birthright!

Children who want to be praised and to "get on "in the competition for the best jobs in the struggle for existence will not get "above themselves" and try to question or counter any of this. "Who are you to argue with the experts? You are just one atom in the whole of society." Either they will subscribe to the dogmas of the faith or else turn away to other topics more congenial or more "fun". But these "truths" will still be there conditioning life and views of the world and notions of what is *possible* action for people; but even more than that, conditioning *a* person's whole *view of themselves and what or who they are*.

More than anything else the modern scientific view of the world is the most skilful religio-mythological presentation of existence ever created. "This is who you are and who you must accept you are; and this knowledge supplies the limits and conditions your possibilities of action as a human being in the world.

Pauline, in her reply, says she is connected to Catholic spirituality. Well, someone I feel, who saw the advent of the world-view I have just described and which dominates life today and supplies us with the background for our self-image, was **John Henry Newman**. His life and work are an interesting testament to someone who would never accept the definitions of himself,

society and of the universe offered him in his development and outgrew them one after another. True he ended as a cardinal. But one can surely feel that even then he still felt himself as an evolving spirit outgrowing all restrictive forms. Interestingly a priest of the Birmingham oratory once publicly agreed with me on this. That is just a prominent example. In my opinion a similar challenge comes everyone's way.

Let us imagine someone born in the latter half of the 20th c growing up into the self -definitions available from the surrounding culture and education. One of these definitions is of course gender .It seems to be a very obvious fact. You are male or female. Everyone expects and wants you to accept this fact about yourself. After Watson and Crick it could even be verified by chromosomes. It is a **Hard Outer Fact** in your life.

Yet a surprising number of people experienced as an *inner* fact that they were *not* represented inwardly to themselves by the obviously given hard outer fact. They knew that to a greater or lesser extent their inner self -perception contradicted the outer world's facts .How could this be?

It presented a conundrum as Jan Morris famously expressed it. Either one could try to suppress the inner, in obedience to the outer, or else try to overthrow the outer by asserting the inner but by forcing the process not necessarily allowing the inner to be born very harmoniously Or as many do and did they could seek a kind of compromise between the two. All these have been tried as I am sure Pauline knows.

But it seems to me that there is something extra involved in all this. It was felt at first by psychologists and psychiatrists that people who experienced this opposite gender feelings strongly were ill. They were perhaps mad, or in a way, demonstrated a sort of extreme homosexuality .They were to be "cured." This is what "science" in the 1950s & 1960's thought. They could point to the fact of the chromosomes. XX or XY. Ordinary society took its cue from science .Trans people were weird, sick, disgusting, ripe for bashing etc., etc. .I have personally experienced all these! Or they are interested in 'perverted' sex; maybe prostitutes, a disgrace, betrayers of masculinity etc. And for church people they were to be excluded or regarded as sinners. They must accept their guilt etc. and be sorry! Many indeed tried or try to comply and beg forgiveness for their sin. Interestingly, the horror of *his* society towards Newman in the 19thC for much of his time pre- echoes all of this. He was a traitor to his church and country (for converting to Catholicism); was not "man enough" to marry and beget, and treated very nervously even by the church which did accept him up to a point. One can read his life to see what I mean. His "masculinity has been cast into doubt. Very shocking for Imperial macho Britain!

But the challenge Newman accepted went far beyond a compromise with the life around him. And I suggest that in the experience of being **Trans**, one's whole being, one's very selfhood is presented in a stark form with a challenge not only to one-self but to the *whole science of our time, which tries to tell you who you are!* This science is predicated on a view of the world in which "trans experience" makes no sense at all. The trans experience in fact contradicts assumptions and teachings given by external science.

In our day, when the "treatment" of Trans" has changed so much this maybe more difficult to see. Science now has the "technological means and the surgical wherewithal to seemingly "correct" the problem .You can be a regular "female" up to a point anyway, and maybe in the future more miracles will be possible? **But was that really the problem?**

Are naturally born women exempt from the conditioning factors of their society then? Or do they experience the same in a different way? Do trans men (FTM) really want to be" men " of the type that are 12 to the dozen? Is that all it was for?

In fact all this shows, though I know many will not accept this, *that Human beings have begun to outgrow the gender division of mankind altogether.* This is what we maybe express often very inadequately but is perhaps the root of the question. Transgender postulates a different cosmos from Prof. Brian Cox's one where "love" and "intelligence" have quite a different meaning. I suggest that if one takes one's self-experience seriously and shall we say in a **religious** (or devoted) way then it opens a door into a much wider experience of Human existence and meaning; one, as Newman says which is evolving and we are evolving along with it.

But of course not everyone will want to go into this. It is certainly easier and more comfortable to seek a peaceful agreement with a society which ultimately has lost its and is felt as pointless or corrupt by so many today. Well, as Newman also said, 'the world" cannot supply the *raison d'être* , whether in the form of monarchs, nationalism, churches or even scientists. There is always something in the Human Being, an "I" which is "not of this world", and I suggest that the sense of this "I" and therefore the feeling that one is oneself ultimately "not of this world" is the key to what Trans is all about.

An Emergency Call Centre worker in London has been dismissed from her job, much to the dismay of colleagues who are reportedly unhappy with her treatment. It seems a male caller dialled 999 from a mobile phone stating, "I am depressed and lying here on a railway track. I am waiting for the train to come so I can finally meet Allah." Apparently "remain calm and stay on the line" was not considered to be an appropriate or correct response..



THE CAITLYN JENNER EFFECT—exposing the fault lines in society—and in us. This is one of the highest-exposure transitions ever. I believe we should reflect on its implications, whatever our personal feelings, as the very extremity of this situation highlights many aspects of the trans dilemma. I have made a selection from the torrent of media coverage over the last few months.

All trans people are different, and Jenner's choice to transition how she chose was admirable given the immense public scrutiny. 28th July 2015 Naith Paynton

There's never been a trans person like Caitlyn Jenner before. There's never been anyone with her profile and media exposure, who transitioned later in life, and so publicly. That's not easy. Transition is not like flipping a switch. Of course we decry anyone who holds up one aspect of transition (genital surgery being the usual culprit) as the moment a person "finishes transitioning" or "becomes a man or a woman". But often we uphold this idea in less obvious ways. When a trans friend or relative comes out a trans, and asks us to use a new name, new pronouns, we do that. When a public figure comes out, the media invariably, these days, begins using the person's new name and pronouns immediately. We can end up seeing this one moment, the moment we are told, as the "light switch" moment. There is almost certainly no trans person in history who came out to all the people in their life in one moment and began using their new identifiers with everyone immediately. Trans people start by coming out to ourselves. That's a personal process, and not governed by a time limit.



Feminist writer Julie Burchill launched an attack on Caitlyn Jenner – claiming it would be braver if she were a gay man. 7th June 2015

The newspaper columnist – who has previously described trans women as "shims", "shemales", and "big white blokes having their cocks cut off" – made the claims in an article for the Sunday Times. In her column, Burchill branded Caitlyn Jenner "selfish", and refers to her as "self-pitying", "unfortunate" and a "simpering vamp. Transitioning is nothing more than something people do in the pursuit of happiness via extreme selfishness. I have no moral objection to this – that's how I've lived my life and it has made me very happy. It's not 'bad' – but it's certainly not brave."

Ms Burchill also claimed that "transgendered people" who have criticized her in the past like to "play the bed-wetting victim", branding them the "cry-bullies of identity politics". "Another oddity is the knee-jerk claims of 'bravery' made by their monstrous regiments of cyberfans. While I do think that people who transition (awful word, reminiscent of the sci-fi dream of teleporting, but 'sex change' is unfashionably no-nonsense these days) have guts, I wouldn't say they're 'brave', as they're doing it just for themselves, and bravery is about doing things for other people – being a fireman, being a soldier on the side of freedom, being someone who stands up to any sort of fascism. (And being someone who donates bits of their body to others while they're still alive, rather than have them chucked in the surgical waste bin.) It would have been far braver, in my opinion, to come out as homosexual in the macho circles in which Maloney and Jenner became wealthy and powerful."



Franklin Graham, American evangelist, says he cannot believe that Caitlyn Jenner, Olympic gold medallist, is being honoured with the ESPN ESPY Award for Courage. 4th July 2015

"I find this hard to swallow after spending time with wounded military veterans and their spouses with Operation Heal Our Patriots – they are true heroes and their lives define courage," he wrote on Facebook. "Some have had 30 or 40 surgeries, not to change their gender, but to try to put their bodies back together after defending our country. Jenner is a very confused person - it is not right to proclaim her as a "hero" to the world as it is sending the wrong message out. Give me a break. If you want an example of real courage, it's when Jesus Christ willingly allowed Himself to become your sin and died in your place on the cross – the Righteous One for the unrighteous."



A comment about 'true bravery' in the wake of Caitlyn Jenner coming out. 5th June 2015

Terry Coffey posted a photo of what looked like two US army soldiers, and wrote: "As I see post after post about Bruce Jenner's transition to a woman, and I hear words like, bravery, heroism, and courage, just thought I'd remind all of us what real courage, heroism, and bravery looks like."

Caitlyn Jenner takes seventh place on Woman's Hour Power List 2nd July 2015

The Woman's Hour Power List honours those women who have a large and influential impact on the world. Jenner, star from Keeping Up With the Kardashians and former Olympic gold medal winner, has taken 7th place.

Sarah Vine, judge and Daily Mail columnist, said: "Initially, many of us felt that Kim Kardashian would have to appear somewhere – not because any of us felt any particular admiration for the woman, but simply because her influence on millions of women worldwide is undeniable. But then the Caitlyn Jenner story broke and I in particular felt that she trumped all others in the celebrity stakes. I understand why someone like Jenner might make people feel uncomfortable; but she is a human being like the rest of us and should not be denied the same rights – or indeed respect – as those who live more conventional lives. As to her influence, it can only be to the good if a wider audience can learn to understand her experience."

Caitlyn Jenner has joined Huffington Post as a contributing blogger. 6th July 2015

Jenner is to write a series titled, 'The Real Me', exploring the issues facing and people of the LGBT community. Her first post was titled "The Journey Begins." The article starts with "Hi everyone. Caitlyn here," before detailing her experiences during the weeks since she first discussed her transition openly. "Up until now, I have totally isolated myself from the transgender community, so I have a lot of catching up to do. I feel such a responsibility to this courageous group to try to get it right and tell all sides of the story. To me, that's always the biggest question: am I doing it right? I've heard every horror story there is in the book. You wouldn't believe the types of ordeals these people have had, how they have had to literally fight for their own survival. Many trans teens are bullied and abused in high school. It's just horrendous." She ends with a declaration that sounds like a tag line in the making: "Let's live our true selves and make a positive difference while doing it."

An Arizona-based pastor has expressed "perfect hatred" for Caitlyn Jenner because of her transition, saying that he wants her heart to "explode right now". 13th June 2015



Pastor Steven Anderson, who has in the past claimed that the world could be cured of AIDS "by Christmas" if "homos" were stoned to death, this week took aim at Caitlyn Jenner. Talking about former Olympian Jenner celebrating her transition on the cover of Vanity Fair, Anderson repeatedly misgenders her, before saying he prayed for her to die. "I'd never heard of him [Jenner] until this week," said Anderson. "Bruce Jenner has basically mutilated his body, apparently, and he's being praised by our president. Our President Obama is praising him, or praising her – we don't even know what it is. I think that [Obama] used the female pronoun about somebody named Bruce. Listen to me – I hate him with a perfect hatred," said Anderson of Jenner. "I have no love for this Bruce freak. I hope he dies today, I hope he dies and goes to Hell – he's disgusting, he's filthy, he's reprobate. I hate these filthy sons of Belial... I hope God touches Jenner's heart. . . . I pray that his heart would explode right now."

[There were 18 on-line comments within a few hours; here is a sample:]

- "At least she has a heart.....The worst part is that he thinks he's holy, loved, and saved. Wow - talk about delusional."
- "He fancies her.Exactly what I was thinking when I read the article."
- "About the hatred thing: Most Christians felt like that towards people they didn't like for much of history. This fuzzy, warm, loving, compassionate stuff is basically a new thing.... he's just old school."
- "Jesus and our Lord must be proud to have such a lovely and compassionate man speaking in their name. Hopefully they take him back to heaven asap."
- "People who stand up in public and say things like this are psychotic. Period. It is terrifying to consider what sort of religious environments produce and reinforce this sort of personality."
- "Fanatics such as these are potentially as dangerous as the preachers who encourage terrorist groups such as al Qaeda."
- "What we, the LGBT community, need is our equivalent to the Black Panthers to sort out b'stards like that. I suppose such an organisation would be called the Pink Panthers!"
- "The US certainly proves time and again it has a serious problem with extremist Christians."
- "Pastor Steven Anderson, that you profess to be a Christian, and you want anyone to die for whatever reason, speaks volumes about your "professed Christianity." Love is diametrically opposed to hate, in any form, unless you are strictly Old Testament and forgo the New Testament. For example: *[I have greatly edited and shortened these passages, which would otherwise take up about a page - editor]*

Matthew 7:1-29 "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **1 John 4:20** If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **Proverbs 10:12** Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. **1 John 3:15** Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. **Leviticus 19:17** "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. **1 John 2:9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **1 John 2:11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

You, Pastor Steven Anderson, need to drop to your knees begging forgiveness until your heart, mind, and tongue are cleansed."

Sarah Hodgson, a Data Warehouse reporting analyst at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, writes about her transition to her true gender role and her experiences at work.

The voice I'm talking to you with now has not always been my voice. My voice was that of somebody else, someone who was never really me. If you ask anyone who ever hid behind a camouflage, they will tell you the same as I'm about to tell you: the disguise becomes increasingly difficult and tiring to maintain, and you reach a point where you have to address it.

The pressure I was under led to increasingly withdrawn behaviour and my work suffered. I struggled to host meetings without additional support due to a severe lack of confidence. This wasn't how I wanted to live so I had to do something about it. But always, when the courage came to make the shift, the same voice inside stopped me. What would my work colleagues think?

The answer to that was the most surprising of all. My workplace was the very location that helped liberate me. I've been a reporting analyst in Bank of America Merrill Lynch's data warehouse team in Chester for nine years but until recently my "true self" had been at work for far less time. My job is to decipher numerical data and I enjoy it immensely. I work in a small team and value a career that allows me the freedom to manage my time and work in an intellectually stimulating environment. But secretly, I was not at ease and I really struggled to be myself. I kept my personality hidden, choosing to be the quiet team member. One of my biggest concerns when transitioning to my true gender was revealing this truth to colleagues. I was worried that people might not trust my opinion, or my ability to do my work. The big irony was, it was my own assumptions that were about to be challenged. I was about to find out that I couldn't have been more wrong.

I'm proud to say that of the most inspiring things I've learnt from my transition is that you never know the potential of people to help. My transition was not only very liberating, it ultimately helped me completely re-evaluate my position in the team. It opened my own eyes to the people around me and revealed that I had in fact underestimated *their* true potential. Never in my wildest dreams did I think the experience would be so positive – in all respects.

One of the most rewarding outcomes of my journey is helping other people. I now co-chair the Chester arm of Bank of America Merrill Lynch's LGBT employee network, which seeks to support the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community by helping to raise awareness of the struggles and issues faced by this group. The work on this project would not have been possible without the on-going support of my colleagues, who act as role models for other workplaces in all areas of the world. The company's Global Ally Programme encourages colleagues to stand up as allies and support their peers, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or creed.

This supportive environment was recently strengthened when Bank of America Merrill Lynch became the first company in the UK to offer Gender Reassignment Surgery as part of its health insurance package. By offering the chance for me to complete my transition, I will truly be able to bring my full self to work and take a massive step to conquering my dysphoria, alongside skipping the years-long NHS waiting list.

Outside work, I support transgender people through online forums. If I can inspire just one person to bring their whole self to work I know I will have succeeded. That's not unique to the LGBT community; it applies to anyone who fears they have to hide their true self from others.

Kicking down the closet door is the most empowering thing I have ever done, and today I can confidently say I am the person I have always meant to be. If there is a future for the workplace, it is in embracing people's differences. By providing a platform for people to be themselves you allow them to be happier, and therefore to contribute more. The other day, a colleague said that "one's biggest strength is that we are all different" – it's so true.

The best advice I can give to those struggling in any big life change is this: be confident in your decision. Be honest. Be positive. And perhaps most importantly, have faith in those around you. You never know what to expect, or just how far they will carry you.

The two types of reaction online:

- 'Thank you, Sarah, for your heart warming account. As a cisgender male I can't begin to understand what it is like to go through the process of transitioning, but as a gay man I can relate to the slant you give to your experience in your article, namely that of being who you are, no longer pretending, and thereby finally realising your true potential in your career which you could not do when you were pretending to be someone else.'

Your story shows the common ground between LGB and T. While you and other transgender people have been through far more than I have in your journey towards being who you really are, the similarity between our experiences is still there nonetheless. I hope your article will help to convince more cisgender LGB people to accept trans (and also intersex) people as allies fighting for a similar cause.'

- 'He is a man, and can never be a woman. Sad for him, but true nevertheless. We cannot always get what we want.'

Compare this almost unbelievable* case from the U.S.A. : Trans woman denied entry to nightclub for 'cross-dressing' 23rd June 2015 *(look at the picture)

Ms Floresca was on the guest list at The Valkyrie nightclub on the night she attended. "When I was about to get in, the bouncer refused to let me in because according to dress code policy, they don't allow cross dressers. I smiled and showed them my California State ID. I said 'I'm female. I don't live here, I'm from California.' In my 3 years of living in the U.S. this never happened to me." The bouncer eventually allowed her entry – but just a few weeks later she returned and the same thing happened. This time, even after showing her ID, the bouncer reportedly said "That's still a man". Ms Floresca said: "I still can't believe that some people still think transgenders as crossdressers. We should not dehumanize people because of their decisions to be themselves. I want this to change."





The Pope has given some advice to transgender people – that they should just accept the body that came as “God’s gift”. 19th June 2015,

The Pope made the comments in his encyclical, which was published yesterday. He wrote: “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home”. The Pope also attacked gender theory, suggesting that trans people are actually just struggling with same-sex attraction. “For example, I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it ... the removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. Whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation”.

A Spanish bishop has determined that a trans man may not serve as a godparent of his nephew.

28th July 2015

Alex Salinas appealed to Bishop Rafael Zornoza after he was told by his local priest that he would not be able to be godfather of his nephew because he does not live “in accordance with the Catholic faith.” However, Bishop Zornoza rejected the complaint, insisting that the parish priest was “kind and understanding” in conveying to Mr Salinas that he “cannot serve as a baptismal sponsor because of canonical requirements that a sponsor live in accordance with the faith”. However, the priest said that he could still “spiritually encourage and help the child in living the faith. No one should be surprised if someone cannot be admitted” because of the life choices, as it is “something that happens often,” the bishop said.

Mr Salinas said that the parish priest was initially receptive to having him be the child’s godfather, but later changed his mind after contacting the diocese, the Spanish news agency EFE reported.

A transgendered Spanish legislator has since called for a study of whether the church’s decision equates to a national hate-crimes and hopes to challenge the religious body in court.

I INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING, NOT DIRECTLY TRANS-RELATED, AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE PROBLEMS WITHIN ANGLICANISM



A Vicar in Hull has hit out at a decision by a canon at York Minster to bless the city’s Pride parade, suggesting that accepting gay people means also accepting paedophiles and “serial adulterers”. 19th June 2015

Speaking on local radio, Reverend Melvin Tinker refused to deny that he was likening homosexuality to paedophilia. He was responding to a decision by Canon Michael Smith of York Minster to come out onto the steps of the Minster and bless the Pride parade. “I am outraged that this should go on in the name of York Minster, in the name of Christianity, and in the name of the diocese. It really is just so provocative, and is incredibly insensitive, and a plain wrong thing to do at this time. If homosexual sex falls into the immoral category, then it is in the same category as any other immoral action.”

BUT

A Baptist church has said it will allow gay and transgender ministers to be ordained. 17th August 2015

The First Baptist Church of Greenville – in South Carolina – has said it will allow LGBT and transgender ministers to be ordained after a lengthy debate within the church community. The church held discussions – which lasted six months – centred around the question: “Can you worship and live with the LGBT community in the church?” The result was to allow gay and trans unions and ministers.

Senior Minister Jim Dant said the church was in favour of “embracing the complexities of gender identity. What I heard was, ‘We need to do the right thing, regardless of what anybody thinks or says about us. There were a few people who said, ‘Are they going to start calling us the gay church in town? (But church members) know being open and welcoming to all people is part of the essential nature of our community of faith – even those against the decision have chosen to remain as part of the congregation.”

The decision was met with opposition from a number of anti-gay groups – including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an umbrella coalition of 2,000 moderate Baptist churches. In a statement, the homophobic body said: “The foundation of a

"My daughter went to a local McDonalds and ordered a burger. She asked the person behind the counter for 'minimal lettuce.' He said he was sorry, but they only had iceberg."



Nadia Bolz Weber: A pastor for America's outsiders

6th July 2015

Taken from Jane Little, BBC News, Denver

At the House for All Sinners and Saints in the US city of Denver, a foul-mouthed tattoo-loving Lutheran pastor who was once a Pagan, an alcoholic and a stand-up comedian, is reinventing church.

Nadia Bolz Weber is 6'1", has short, salt-and-pepper hair slicked back from her face, wears dark pink lipstick, and her bare arms are well-toned from many hours spent lifting weights in the gym. Elaborate, colourful tattoos extend all the way up both arms. Closer inspection reveals characters and scenes from the Bible., images from the entire liturgical year.



Nadia Bolz Weber could not be described as pious. She is frank about her wild past and her character flaws - she finds it hard to be nice to people, she insists - and she tells stories that are funny, self-deprecating, and riddled with expletives. Her route to the priesthood was circuitous - via alcoholism and stand-up comedy - and she uses her story to engage fellow "outsiders" who might think they don't belong in church.

She was raised in Colorado Springs in the highly conservative Church of Christ. "I had a really harsh religious upbringing," she says, "fundamentalist, legalistic, sectarian." She briefly attended one of the Church's universities, Pepperdine, in Malibu, California, perched on the cliffside above the Pacific Ocean. But she doesn't recall much of her four months there. "I was a drug-addled mess," she says. She dropped out of college, moved to Denver, Colorado, and went on a bender for several years. "I was just this kid who didn't fit my whole life. I was so angry. That anger protected, saved me in a way - until I added drugs and alcohol to it and then it almost killed me! I was perfectly happy with the idea that I'd be dead by 30."

But one day her close friend, PJ, killed himself. She knew him from the comedy circuit and his funeral was held in a comedy club in Denver, which she describes as "packed with academics, queers, recovering alcoholics". By then she had left the Church of Christ, and had already taken up and abandoned Paganism. But she still believed in God and so as the only one of PJ's friends who had any faith, she was asked to preside at his funeral. "And I looked out and I thought: 'These are my people and they don't have a pastor - and maybe I'm actually called to be a pastor to my people. She went off to a Lutheran seminary and later started the House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver - its mission to minister to "outsiders"."

"I had to start a church I'd want to show up to, basically because I'd rarely gone to one I liked. I actually told my bishop at some point during the process, 'Look, you could put me in a parish in the suburbs of some small town, but you and I both know that would be ugly for everyone involved, so how about I just start one?' He goes: 'Yeah, that sounds like a better idea.'" One third of her congregation is gay, lesbian or transgender. And they celebrate that fact. There is even a "Minister of Fabulousness", a drag queen called Stuart.

They worship in the round with the altar at the centre. She says that's because the many younger people who attend have a "built-in suspicion of institutions and a suspicion of presumed authority". They share roles and sing hymns unaccompanied, in the *a capella* tradition she brought from the Church of Christ. She says that there used to be 40 of them on any given Sunday. Then, after she was featured in The Denver Post and preached to a mass outdoor congregation one Easter, the congregation doubled overnight. Suddenly she was drawing in 65-year-olds from the suburbs, prompting what she describes as an "identity crisis". "It was awful. I just looked around, I was like, 'Man, these people could go to any mainline Protestant church in the city and see a bunch of people who look just like them. Why are they messing up our weird?!'" she says.

"So I called a friend of mine who has a similar church, and I was like: 'Hey, have you ever had normal people mess up your church?' expecting him to be like: 'Yeah, here's what you do.' And he goes, 'Yeah, well you guys are really great at welcoming the stranger if it's a young transgender kid, but sometimes the stranger looks like your mum and dad.'" Bolz Weber called a meeting to discuss the invasion of her "indie boutique of a church. A young congregant called Asher spoke up, 'As the young transgender kid who was welcomed into your community, I'd just like to say that I'm really glad there are people here who look like my mom and dad because they love me in a way my parents can't right now.'"

Bolz Weber has no prejudices about sexual identity or orientation, and no patience with the debates about sexuality that have ensnared so many churches, including her own Lutheran denomination. She says it is because she doesn't read the Bible in a literal way - in fact, she calls such a reading idolatry. She believes in sin - "I never weary of speaking of the ways in which we are broken and in need of grace," she says - she just doesn't understand it in sexual terms. But while she is socially progressive, she adheres to the teachings of the orthodox Lutheran tradition.

"Theologically I'm not liberal," she says. "Because what I see in a lot of what would be categorised as liberal theology is what we call a high anthropology, which is a very high opinion of human beings and what we can accomplish, like 'All the good of God is inside of you!' "And I'm like, 'Are you kidding? It's dark in there!' It's there, but there are other things there too."

Thanks partly to her autobiography, *Pastrix: The Cranky Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and Saint*, which became a bestseller, she has become a sought-after speaker across and beyond the United States - in traditional evangelical churches, among others. "Isn't that hilarious? That they might not ever have invited a woman preacher before and then they invite one that's me?! It's like they went from zero to 60," she says.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Bolz Weber keeps getting invited to appear on reality TV shows. She has also - and it must be a rare combination - been asked if she'd like to become a bishop. She has no intention of accepting either offer.

THE LEGAL SITUATION ACROSS THE WORLD

- **Eire:** 16.7.15 The passage of Ireland's revolutionary new Gender Recognition Act – which allows trans people to legally change their gender without seeing a doctor - after a 22-year legal battle by trans woman Dr Lydia Foy .
- **India:** 8.6.15 The first ever out trans college principal Manabi Bandopadhyay has now been appointed to a panel for new policy on trans issues.
- **U.S./India:** 2.6.15 Amruta Alpesh Soni says her experiences of trying to get a US visa has shown her how progressive India is. The trans health official from India had her visa put on hold due to the sex listed on her passport. She recently received a new passport with her sex listed as "T", under Indian laws that recognise transgender people as a third sex.
- **U.S.:** 28-year-old Elle Hearn is an activist fighting for black trans women to have the right to be safe.
- **U.S.:** 10.8.15 Shiloh Quine, who has been in prison since 1980, has become one of the first prison inmates to be granted a gender reassignment operation – that will be paid for by the State of California – however, it is still undecided whether or not an inmate having access to this type of surgery should be able to do so as a constitutional right.
- **U.S.:** 17.7.15 Jeb Bush voices support for trans people joining military
- **U.S.:** 18.8.15 White House hires first transgender member of staff
- **New Zealand** government is changing the way it records gender – allowing people to identify as "gender diverse". 17.7.15
- **Norway** has proposed extending to children the right of its citizens to change their legal gender. 25th June 2015
- **Poland** has passed the country's first ever transgender recognition legislation. 24th July 2015
- One of the leading universities in **Thailand** has issued new uniform guidelines which are more inclusive of transgender students. 10.6.15



Raffi Freedman-Gurspan

THE LAW IN THE U.K.

- In the UK, unlike the U.S.A., trans people are allowed to serve openly – and Lieutenant General Andrew Gregor recently said it might even be possible for transgender women to serve on the frontline in the infantry.
- A Petition to the UK Parliament to allow transgender people to self-define their own legal gender has gained nearly 10,000 signatures. 24.7.15
- A Parliamentary committee is to look at provisions for transgender children in the UK, it has been confirmed. 28.8.15 The *Women and Equalities Select Committee* has announced the topics for September's evidence sessions. Healthcare professionals and trans activists will give evidence at the following sessions, all of which are open to the public:

September 8, 10:30 AM – Healthcare and trans people

Jess Bradley, Committee member, Action for Trans Health
 Terry Reed OBE, Co-founder, Gender Identity Research and Education Society
 Steve Shrubbs, Chief Executive, West London Mental Health NHS Trust
 Dr John Dean, Chair of the NHS national Clinical Reference Group for Gender Identity Services

September 8, 11:30 AM – Hate crime and transphobia

Helen Belcher, Director, Trans Media Watch
 Prof Neil Chakraborti, Director, Leicester Centre for Hate Studies
 Chief Constable Jane Sawyers, National Police Chiefs' Council lead on Transgender

September 15, 10:30 AM – Issues affecting trans youth

Susie Green, Chair, Mermaids
 Dr Jay Stewart, Director, Gendered Intelligence
 Anna Lee, Vice President: Welfare and Community, Lancaster University Students' Union
 Dr Ashley Miller, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Gender Identity Development Service, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

September 15, 11:30 AM – Issues affecting trans people in the criminal justice system

Prof Michael Brookes OBE, HMP Grendon/Birmingham City University
 Megan Key, Equalities Manager for the Midlands Division of the National Probation Service
 Michael Quinn, Executive Director, Out-Side-In

Law firm K&L Gates has made a submission to the committee, representing non-gendered campaigner Christie Elan-Cane on a pro bono basis. The campaigner recently urged politicians to consider recognition of non-gendered.

- **Why the UK's gender recognition laws desperately need updating** 23rd July 2015 Keith Payton

The Gender Recognition Act in the UK (2004) was a landmark piece of legislation. But as time has gone on, it's become clear that the GRA is letting down a whole host of trans and other people.

People under 18 Right now you can only access gender recognition if you are over 18, which leaves trans kids behind.

Intersex people cannot change their legal gender without pretending to be transgender. There are also many intersex people whose gender is not exclusively "man" or "woman" and they share that issue with....

Non binary, genderqueer and non gendered people The law allows people to change legal gender from male to female or vice versa, and that's it. You cannot legally be a gender that is neither.

People who aren't very good with paperwork

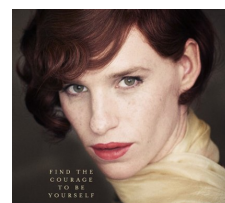
To prove that you have been living as your gender for at least two years, applicants are required to provide six different documents. Things such as payslips, bank statements and gas bills. Six is a lot. Six is more than you need to get a mortgage.

Where the UK was once leading the way we are now being left behind.

Headlines from around the world

MEDIA

- **Amazon's transgender-based TV show *Transparent*** will soon air the second series. A third series is planned. The show's creator Jill Soloway: **There is a sea change happening right now, a revolution, and we're definitely in there, a part of it.**
- **Google** has released a new advert featuring a transgender man talking about his transition
- **Online games**, including ***Guild Wars 2*** are increasingly adding minor trans characters. Transgender actress Bethany Black has landed a role in sci fi series ***Doctor Who***. It is likely to air on November 14.
- **BBC's** first transgender-focussed sitcom, ***Boy Meets Girl***, will air on BBC2 later this year. Editor Kristian Smith said: "This is a heart-warming romantic comedy that draws on the glorious differences that shape all of us. It's a brilliant thing to be able to support comedy that is not only funny, but can also promote affirming messages of humanity and acceptance."
- The first openly transgender housemate entered **the US Big Brother house** 24.6.15. Audrey Middleton
- Oscar-nominated Hollywood actress Kathleen Turner has been cast in a **new off-Broadway play 'Would You Still Love Me If...'** by John S Anastasi, which explores transgender issues
- **Ruby Rose**, genderfluid star of the Netflix prison drama ***Orange is the New Black***. "Gender fluidity is not really feeling like you're at one end of the spectrum or the other. For the most part, I definitely don't identify as any gender. I'm not a guy; I don't really feel like a woman, but obviously I was born one. So, I'm somewhere in the middle. Being genderfluid is about not having to succumb to whatever society – whether it's work or family or friends or whoever – makes you feel like you're supposed to be because of how you were born."
- **Opera singer Breanna Sinclairé** made history by becoming **the first trans woman to sing at a professional sporting event**. Sinclairé sang the national anthem at an Oakland Athletics's baseball game against the San Diego Padres. 19.6.15
- **'The Danish Girl'** has a release date of 1 January 2016 – in the middle of awards season. No comment. Eddie Redmayne plays transgender pioneer Lili Elbe in the film, directed by Tom Hooper. Redmayne researched how to live as a transgender woman in the 1920s. **The director said: "What's extraordinary is when I first fell in love with the idea of making this film, it was perceived to be a very hard film to finance, and now people talk to me as if it was an obvious film to do, and that's just in five or six years."**



N.H.S.

- **The Daily Star has published an article condemning the NHS for providing gender reassignment surgery to trans women.** (15.6.15) It claims that trans women are "men desperate to follow in the footsteps of boxing promoter [Kellie] Maloney by undergoing gender reassignment." It also quoted Andrea Williams of the Christian Legal Centre, who said: "It seems the NHS is following the fashionable transgender whim rather than following the science and providing psychological care so these people can live happily in the sex they were born into." Roger Goss of Patient Concern said: "If you surveyed the general public you would probably find a majority against 'free' sex operations at a time when the NHS is so strapped for cash it has to institute rationing. Most would probably prioritise treating the sick over helping those unhappy in their own bodies." Trans activists condemned the article, saying it is damaging to suggest conversion therapy, and emphasising that gender reassignment surgery is medically necessary.
- **NHS England is launching a new initiative to improve services for trans and non-binary issues.** (30.6.15) A symposium took place this day, bringing together health and social care workers to work on a plan to tackle issues faced by such patients. The event was described as "urgent". Representatives from organisations such as the GMC and BMC met with patient groups and representatives, aiming to encourage professionals to think about how they interact with and provide services to trans and non-binary people. The NHS said in a statement that it has become clear through patient engagement that trans and non-binary patients still faced stigma and inequality when accessing healthcare. Dame Barbara Hakin, Director of Commissioning Operations for NHS England, said: "Patients have told us that there is an urgent need for action to improve their experience of health services across the board. It is vital that the treatment of these individuals is not seen as a 'specialist' issue, and that patients are treated with dignity and respect. We are hopeful that bringing together patient and professional representatives in this way will help us secure a joint commitment and a plan to address the inequalities that these patients face."
- **Trans people in England could soon be facing waits of up to 12 years for NHS gender treatment, unless action is taken to tackle backlogs, a group has warned.** (16.7.15) There were an average of 284 new referrals for G.I.S. per month, while just 167 patients have their first appointment in the same period. Across the UK, there are now 2744 patients on waiting lists – which means that even if no more referrals are made, the existing backlog would take over a year to clear. If patient referrals continue at the current rate and capacity does not increase, transgender people will end up stuck on waiting lists for years before seeing a doctor. UK Trans Info warns: "If nothing changes, all of the GICs will have waiting lists in excess of a year by March 2017. Those referred to the Leeds GIC face a projected wait of 5 years 11 months. Northamptonshire Gender Dysphoria Service a wait of 7 years and 4 months Newcastle will have a wait of twelve and a half years."