



**'To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage', held on Saturday 27th
September 2014 at St John's Church, Waterloo, London.
Love's constancy & legal niceties: transgendered perspectives on marriage.
Workshop: Led by Tina Beardsley & Susan Gilchrist**



Welcome



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Introduction

- This workshop considers the experiences which are encountered in marriages when a transgendered individual is involved.
- Every person in such a relationship has a personal story, strong emotions are often involved and it is necessary to define the boundaries at the start.
- It is not appropriate to talk about intimate personal details of relationships (if people need that then maybe talk to us privately and we can look at appropriate referral) but general feelings and emotions is fine.
- The Sibyls ongoing work with couples: a professionally facilitated weekend is being planned and this will consider in greater depth the issues involved.



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Background

- The Pilling Report provided an initial road map for Shared or Facilitated Conversations. The outcome of these is crucial for the acceptance of same-sex and transgendered relationships in the Church.
- There has been criticism of the use and application of scientific evidence
- This was highlighted by Dr Chris Cook in the Church Times of the 19th September 2014. Points that he made were:
 - Insufficient rigour
 - Careful biblical exegesis needs to be accompanied by an equally careful analysis and interpretation of the scientific evidence



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- The report fails to distinguish carefully between sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual behaviour.
- This failure to ask appropriate, difficult questions makes it difficult to develop a coherent Christian view of sexuality which has both scientific and theological integrity.
- Science, as a strand of reason, seems to contribute little or nothing to the conclusions reached in the report.
- These issues fundamentally affect and influence people's personal relationships, and our understanding of the interactions between love and sex in heterosexual, same-sex, and transgendered partnerships, including the sanctification of marriage.



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Deficiencies

- Even within the frame of existing knowledge the Pilling Report fails to meet scientific criteria
- Uncertainty is excusable but the failure to deal fully with the known issues cannot be excused
- Because even in medical and scientific circles the genesis of gender and sexually variant conditions is not well understood
- A road-block now exists, and there is the need to step back and take a new scientific approach.
- This applies recent academic research on neurophysiology, personality development, and the creation of self-identity in tribal conflict situations



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New Approach

- This approach is established in the context of a new neurophysiological and psychological investigation into the development of personality and self-identity in infancy and early childhood.
- Employs gender dysphoria and the development of Church Doctrines as case studies to test the validity of the approach
- Undertaken by one of the workshop leaders (Susan Gilchrist)
- The results have been made available to the Church of England for use as resource information in the forthcoming Shared Conversations¹

¹ The following papers have been submitted as resource information: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality, Transsexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach. Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Christianity and Crisis: An Overview of Gender and Sexual Difference in the Early and Modern Christian Church". Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Controversy and Crisis: Issues of Gender and Sexuality in the Present Day Christian Church". Copies of these papers can be found on:
<http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>



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Research Conclusions

- It is shown that the traditional teaching of the Christian Church on gender and sexuality opposes, and is directly contradicted by, the findings on human development identified in this research.
- By removing the theological presumptions on gender and sexuality, which dominated both Church and society for the last two thousand years, new insights into biblical texts and psychological precepts are possible.
- It is shown that the teaching of Jesus on gender equality and gender and sexual variance would support the present day insights, and that all transgendered, transsexual lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities in roles that are true to themselves; must all be equally accepted.



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- It is demonstrated that the abandonment of the teaching of Jesus and its replacement with the doctrines which were more representative of those belonging to a gender polarised and the male dominated Greco/Roman society came from the requirement to give respectability to the Church².
- It is shown that this has led to the enforcement of a strong heterosexual, gender defined and an exclusive orthodoxy within which every expression of gender and sexually variant behaviour is considered to be a mortal sin and later a disordered act.
- This research demands radical change in the outlook of the Church.

² The theological arguments are presented in Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Christianity and Crisis: An Overview of Gender and Sexual Difference in the Early and Modern Christian Church". Copies of these papers can be found on: <http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>



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Relationships and Gender and Sexually Variant Behaviour

- The research confirms that as large a range of moral attitudes principles and behaviour will be found amongst the gender and sexually variant communities as that which is encountered in society at large.
- It validates those activities that are engaged in for the pursuit of love and it distinguishes them from those engaged in for the misuse of sex
- It shows why gender identity and sexual orientation need not coincide, and that as extended a range of sexual interests and orientations is also to be expected among transgendered people as there is in society at large
- All of these have major impacts on marriage and on romantic relationships when a transgendered partner is involved.



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Female to Male Transgender Relationships and Survival Rates

- There is a dearth of research on these subjects
- One descriptive study³ examined the prevalence of romantic relationships in a large-scale international sample of female-to-male (FTM) transgender men, the rates that partners stay together during the gender transition of one of the partners, and the interconnections between the perceived social support from romantic relationships and the mental health of FTMs.
- Of those who were in a relationship before they decided to transition, about half reported that their relationship had been maintained. Of the relationships which did not survive after the transition, about half of FTMs reported the reason for separation was related to their transition.

³ Meier, S. Colton; Sharp, Carla; Michonski, Jared; Babcock, Julia C; Fitzgerald, Kara: (2013) "Romantic Relationships of Female-to-Male Trans Men: A Descriptive Study" *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 14:75–85, 2013: Taylor & Francis Group: ISSN: 1553-2739 print / 1434-4599 online DOI: 10.1080/15532739.2013.791651



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Male to Female Transgender Relationships and Survival Rates

- Similar experiences are found with male to female transsexuals. Virginia Erhardt, gives an important insight into the experiences of wives coping with their MTF partners' gender transition⁴.
- Of the genetic males who enter treatment, approximately 50% are either married or they have been married, and about 70% of these have children
- Erhardt describes the wide range of experiences encountered. The book is also analysed in a paper by Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas, and Dhaliwal⁵
- Although these data have not been quantified a similar survival rate to that of female to males might be expected.

⁴ Erhardt, V. (2007). *Head over heels: Wives who stay with cross-dressers and transsexuals*. New York: Haworth Press.

⁵ Bischof, Gary H. Warnaar, Bethany L. Barajas, Mark S. Dhaliwal, Harkiran K (2011). "Thematic Analysis of the Experiences of Wives Who Stay with Husbands who Transition Male-to-Female". *Western Michigan University Michigan Family Review*, 15(1), 16-34, 2011 © Michigan Council on Family Relations



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Sexual Orientation

- In an Internet study of more than 1,000 FTMs the results indicated that trans men may participate in a variety of sexual behaviours with all types of partners⁶. In addition, the sexual attractions of about one third of FTMs shift while they are transitioning, usually from attractions to men only, or women only, or to a more bisexual or queer orientation.
- Circumstantial evidence and Erhardt's study suggests that an equivalent rate amongst MTF transsexuals might be expected.

⁶Meier, S. C., Green, J., & Dickey, I., (2010, November). "Sexual behaviors, health, and satisfaction of transgender men (FTMs) with and without hormonal and surgical modifications: Preliminary results. In T. Lostutter (Chair), Sexual health and functioning: Using data to inform cognitive behavioral treatments. Symposium presented at the annual conference of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies, San Francisco, CA. As cited in 3



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Legitimacy

- These findings highlight the fact that some relationships can and do endure through a gender transition, and they emphasise the importance of close, supportive relationships during and after transition.
- The results of these studies demonstrate that from this scientific research, and from practical experience, the love and commitment which can be found in a marriage is not determined by gender identity or by sexual orientation.
- For so long as the Church held temporal power over the structures of society, its theology could not effectively be questioned. It is not science that should be re-examined. It is the theology of the Church



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LEGALITIES AND INCONSISTENCIES

- As a consequence of the Gender Recognition legislation, and following the transition of one partner in a formerly same sex relationship, the couple were able to marry by law and in the Church of England.
- Under the previous legislation a married couple where one partner transitioned and sought gender recognition were required to divorce before gender recognition could be granted. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 resolved many of the anomalies but introduced spousal consent, and affected pension rights.



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SOME SCENARIOS FOR DISCUSSION

- A couple married for 37 years where one partner is a trans woman and lives in dual roles with her family's support. She does not have gender recognition.
- A couple married for 8 years following the gender recognition of one of the partners, but who have been a couple for 42 years.
- A couple married in the Roman Catholic Church 25-30 years ago, one partner transitioned in 2001 but did not obtain gender recognition when this became available because they did not wish to dissolve the marriage and enter into a civil partnership which was obligatory until the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.



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- An elderly married couple, one of whom had had transitioned many years previously, and who did avail themselves of gender recognition – by fast track – when this became available followed by a civil partnership ceremony. Particular care was given to protecting the spouses pension rights although she has predeceased her partner.
- A married couple, one of whom lived in dual role with her spouse's support, and then transitioned after the death of her spouse and who is still single.
- A married couple, who separated and then divorced when one of them transitioned – in some scenarios the spouse supports the transitioning partner up to the point when they become full-time in the gender role.



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- A married couple, where one partner cross-dresses periodically and socially to express a part of their identity, but has no intention of transitioning. If this is a male they usually have a strong male gender identity.
- Someone who was twice married and divorced and attracted to females and who then transitions and is attracted to males.
- A married person transitions and the couple stay together but the partner who has transitioned now finds themselves attracted to someone of the opposite gender to themselves and their spouse.
- A female couple, one of whom has a trans history and also identifies as intersex and who presents butch, and who are able to marry under the legislature of their state (not the UK).



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SOME QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

- What are the legal issues in a marriage where the trans spouse is not the biological parent but wishes to be registered as such?
- What are the impacts of transition on the marriage of those whose children, or some of them, are unsupportive to the trans parent?
- What is your view on the statistics of couples who stay together or separate?
- What are the reasons why couples separate at this point?
- How essential is gender to marriage?
- How should we define heterosexuality and homosexuality – absolutely/seeking the complement/seeking the similar or what?



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THEOLOGY

- The official teaching is that marriage is 'between a man and a woman for life.'
- Transgender and intersex people pose a significant challenge to that assertion.
- Is marriage limited to a man and a woman? Dare we ask what is a man and a woman?
- Are we agreed that Christian marriage, or the ideal, is life-long fidelity?
- What is the role of procreation in marriage?
- What do you understand by gender complementarity and is this essential to a marriage?
- Is marriage a sacrament? Can trans people's marriages reflect the union of Christ and the Church?



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Thank You