

**‘To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage’, held on Saturday
27th September 2014 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at St John’s Church,
Waterloo, London.**

**A Report on The Workshop: Love’s constancy & legal niceties:
transgendered perspectives on marriage
Led by Tina Beardsley & Susan Gilchrist**

ABSTRACT

Transgender and intersex people challenge many of the conventional definitions of gender and sexuality in society. This is particularly so when marriage and romantic relationship are involved. The workshop paper and the results of the discussion are presented in this document. From the limited research available about half of the previously existing marriages survive through the gender transitioning of one of the partners, and of those which do break up, only about half of those involved attribute this to the gender transition itself. The results of these investigations, the scientific research, and practical experience all indicate that the love and commitment which can be found in a marriage is not determined by gender identity or sexual orientation, and this subverting of the boundaries suggests that the same degree of acceptance must be applied to all marriages, heterosexual, same-sex and transgender alike. A discussion of the social, legal and theological consequences examines the barriers to change, and identifies the degrees of acceptance which are still required. A major barrier to change comes from the reluctance of the Christian Churches to engage in any full assessment which takes appropriate account of recent theological insights and new scientific research.

Introduction

This workshop considered the experiences of married transgendered people. Each person in such a relationship has a personal story, and, as strong emotions can be involved, it was necessary to define the boundaries at the start. This was not the forum for disclosing intimate personal details of relationships (those who needed that could talk to us privately and we could recommend appropriate referral) but the expression of general feelings and emotions in the workshop was fine.

The Sibyls, Christian spirituality for transgender people, is undertaking some ongoing work with couples: a professionally facilitated weekend is being planned which aims to support couples and to consider the issues in greater depth.

Background

Together with same-sex relationships, there are strong arguments and differences of opinion. In the Church Times of the 19th September 2014, Dr Chris Cook, Professor of Spirituality, Theology and Health at Durham University, published an article about the Pilling Report on Human Sexuality and its use of scientific evidence. A practical theologian and a scientist, Dr Cook is critical of the report for not evaluating the

scientific evidence with sufficient rigour and asks that more critical attention be given to this evidence when the church engages in the Shared Conversations¹.

Dr Cook says the report raises questions, not only about how we interpret scripture, but also about how we interpret our knowledge of sexuality. He commends the Report for recognising the importance of the scientific evidence, devoting a whole chapter to it, even though the working group did not have a scientific adviser. From the evidence that is presented in this chapter, Dr Cook notes that science, as a strand of reason, seems to contribute little or nothing to the conclusions reached in the report.

He argues that a careful biblical exegesis needs to be accompanied by an equally careful analysis and interpretation of the scientific evidence. He cites as an example the Report's questioning of the Royal College of Psychiatrists submission which it counterbalances with a Core Issues Trust booklet that simply marshals scientific evidence in support of a position previously determined by scripture. The Report's failure to ask appropriate, difficult questions frustrates the development of a coherent Christian view of sexuality which has both scientific and theological integrity. For example, the Report fails to distinguish carefully between sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual attraction, and sexual behaviour.

The chapter "Arguments about Science", p59 paras 193-219, asks and answers six questions. The choice of the questions is significant for the outcome of the answers reached by the Report. None deal with why homosexuality is no longer classified as a psychiatric disorder, for example, and the all-important question "What is natural?" was never asked. Had different questions been put and the scientific evidence evaluated critically, the theological implications of the Pilling Report might have been different, or at least more helpful. This has raised important questions about the resources being prepared for the critically important Shared Conversations which are recommended by the Pilling Report. Will sufficient scientific evidence be included in the resources and will it be properly evaluated? Cook concludes with a reminder that scripture presents us with important theological and prophetic questions about the patterns of stigma and prejudice, which science has identified as underlying (and is consequential upon) much mental health.

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.

Research Studies

One of the workshop leaders, Susan Gilchrist, has undertaken extensive research in this area and the outcomes² of this investigation have been made available to the

¹Cook, Dr Chris (2014); "Unanswered questions on Pilling report". Church Times 19 September 2014. See also the blog by the Rev Colin Coward <http://changingattitude.org.uk/archives/8257>

² The following papers have been submitted to the Church of England as resource information for the discussions: 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

Church of England as a resource during the forthcoming Shared Conversations. It examines gender and sexual difference in the early and modern Christian Church using the results of a new neurophysiological and psychological research study³. The conclusions of this study show that the traditional teaching of the Christian Church on gender and sexuality does not cohere with the findings on human development which are demonstrated by this research⁴.

The early Christian teaching had demanded a revolution in social attitudes, but the message of Jesus which is presented in the Gospels also required the Church to work within society in order to change it. This presented the Church with a difficult choice and a companion paper shows how it attempted to compromise the original Gospel doctrines of gender transcendence and gender equality to achieve the respectability necessary to convey the Christian message into the wider world⁵. By challenging theological presumptions about the neurophysiology and psychology of gender and sexuality, which have dominated both Church and society for the last two thousand years, new insights into biblical texts are made possible. It is shown that the teaching of Jesus on gender equality and on gender and sexual variance would support present day insights, and that all transgendered, transsexual, lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways which fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to be true to themselves, must be fully accepted within the Church of Christ.

The abandonment of the teaching of Jesus⁶, and its replacement with the doctrines which were more representative of those belonging to a gender polarised and a male-dominated Greco/Roman society, has led to the enforcement of a strong

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>

³ Additional papers on the neurophysiological and psychological studies are in the final stages of preparation.

⁴ 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. A copy of this paper can be found on: <http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

⁵ For the description of how this took place see companion papers Gilchrist, S. (2013). "An Unfinished Reformation" or: Gilchrist, S. (to be released in 2014). "From Gender Transcendence to Gender Complementarity: the Development of Attitudes to Gender and Sexuality in the Early and the Modern Church" and: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Reform and the Christian Church".

⁶ This is a radical statement but the neurophysiological and psychological studies show that the traditional Church teaching is no longer sustainable and a fresh look is required. It has been shown that the teachings that were presented by Peter and Paul on gender complementarity and the roles of women were largely based on the prevalent Stoic philosophy. However instead of being interpreted in accordance with a Stoic call of duty they were to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel of Christian Love. That adaptation diminished the radical teaching of Jesus on gender equality and on the roles of women which is present in the Gospels themselves. The second and third of the four perspectives which are employed in this investigation adopt different standpoints to examine the history and the theology of the Christian Church. The second works backwards within Church history and traditions in an attempt to determine what the earliest doctrines adopted by the Christian Church had been. The third of these perspectives independently examines the social and the cultural backgrounds of the Greek, Roman and Jewish societies in which Christianity and the early Church had first been formed. By taking this duality into account and through approaching the history and the traditions of the Church from these two different perspectives, the starting points and the ending points of its early development can be more readily identified and the differences can therefore be more accurately mapped. It is shown that a similar transformation in the attitudes to sexual and gender variance occurred.

heterosexual, gender defined and exclusive orthodoxy in which every expression of gender and sexually variant behaviour is considered to be a mortal sin and, in later centuries, a disordered act.

The transformations demonstrated in this research show that what are presently considered to be the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church on gender equality, and sexual and gender variant behaviour are built on a false foundation. They arose because of the need to obtain respectability in Greco/Roman society and are not derived from the teachings of Jesus himself. For as long as the Christian Church was able to dominate the social structures and the moral values of society these doctrines could not be effectively challenged. The changes in present day society mean that this control has now been broken. It is the clash between what are perceived today as the common sense values of equality and inclusion, and the fervent reliance on the traditional doctrines that is destroying the credibility of Christianity in the eyes of the world. Assessing these issues must be a critical feature of the forthcoming Shared Conversations, for no effective change will be possible until these “core” issues are properly addressed⁷. The papers referenced here examine the changes that are required.

Transgender Relationships

Little research has been carried out on the long term viability, and the relationships between gender identity and sexual orientation in marriages where one person is transgendered, and when transition and gender reassignment takes place during the marriage or romantic relationship.

One descriptive study⁸ 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 the FTM partners. Participants were trans men who had completed an anonymous online survey. Of those who were in a relationship before they decided to transition, about half reported that their relationship had been

⁷ A more extended analysis is given in a further set of papers. The first of these papers: Gilchrist, S. (to be released in late 2014): "Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach" considers the neurophysiological and the psychological processes which are involved in the early development of personality and self-identity without making any reference to the teaching and the doctrines of the Christian Church. That aspect is covered in the second document: Gilchrist, S. (2013), "A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach". This paper examines the Christian doctrines from the neurophysiological and psychological standpoints. The third paper: Gilchrist, S. (to be released in 2014). "From Gender Transcendence to Gender Complementarity: the Development of Attitudes to Gender and Sexuality in the Early and the Modern Church" covers parallel ground to that of the second paper but instead it investigates these issues through an examination of the history and theology of the Christian Church. A fourth paper: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Reform and the Christian Church" considers in more detail the consequences for the Christian Church in the present day. Copies of the above papers can or will be found on <http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

⁸ 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

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.

FTMs who were in a relationship reported fewer symptoms of depression than those who were single. The perceived social support from a romantic partner was found to moderate symptoms of both depression and anxiety. The results support the idea that many relationships may be able to be maintained through a gender transition of one of the partners. 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.

Changes in sexual orientation and gender transition may not coincide. 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 partners⁹. 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 orientation¹⁰. These results support the idea that many relationships may be able to be maintained through a gender transition of one of the partners¹¹.

Similar experiences are found with male to female transsexuals. Virginia Erhardt, a clinical psychologist and gender specialist, provides an important insight into the experiences of wives coping with their MTF partner's gender transition¹². The book is analysed in a paper by Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas, and Dhaliwal¹³, which focusses on the realities of the couples dealing with gender transition. The book is a collection of narratives written in collaboration with thirty women whose partners identify as cross-dressers, transgendered and as male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals. Of the genetic males who enter treatment, approximately 50% are either married or have been married, and about 70% have children¹⁴. The 14 couples were married at the time the narratives were written. Seven couples had been married for 20 years or

⁹Meier, 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 8

¹⁰Meier & Herman, 2011; Meier et al., 2013 Meier, S. C., & Herman, L. (2011, November). The impact of transition on the sexual orientation and sexual orientation identity of transgender men (FTMs). In S. C. Meier (Chair), Sexual orientations, health, and behaviors in the transgender community. Symposium presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Houston, TX. Meier, S. C., Pardo, S., Labuski, C., & Babcock, J. (2013). Measures of clinical health among female-to-male transgender persons as a function of sexual orientation. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 42, 463–474. As cited in 8

¹¹ 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

¹² Erhardt, V. (2007). *Head over heels: Wives who stay with cross-dressers and transsexuals*. New York: Haworth Press.

¹³ 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

¹⁴White, T., & Ettner, R. (2004). Disclosure, risks, and protective factors for children whose parents are undergoing a gender transition. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 8, 129-145.

more, and of these couples five were married over 30 years. Three couples were married for 10-20 years, and four had been married for less than 10 years. For one couple, both partners had been in a prior heterosexual marriage. Eight couples reported being in stable marriages and being happy or very happy, and they described themselves as being best friends or soul mates. Five couples were less certain about the future of their marriage, though all wanted to remain together, and they worried about how the relationship might change as the transition continued. Some wives reported worrying about their MTF partners becoming attracted to men. A final couple remained together, but they functioned more independently, by living separate lives with separate bedrooms and bathrooms, and related to each other as good friends

Gender and Sexuality

These findings and the research literature referenced earlier indicate that gender and sexuality, though linked, are independent. Many transsexual people marry in their imposed gender role for all the right reasons and the love of their partner¹⁵. However as age increases the drive to transition often becomes stronger, and if these dynamics remain unmanaged the outcome can be a sudden and unprepared disclosure or a mental breakdown. This can have devastating consequences. There is the breakdown of relationships and commitments through the failure to cope, even when love is as strong as ever. There is the blame for letting oneself down, and hurting other people, and the guilt for one's inability to conform to the edicts of others and to one's own expectations. Crippling harm can be done to transsexual people by the attitudes of some religious groups who heap guilt on those who cannot follow the path they prescribe. The trauma which this creates can be enormous and further attempts to fight the conflict only accelerate the demand. Much of one's self identity is built on a foundation which is incorrect, and a different approach is needed to calm¹⁶ the dynamics and provide a firm base¹⁷.

¹⁵ Gilchrist, S. (2011): "LGB&T People: Labels and Faith" This account was prepared following a joint presentation given by Susan Gilchrist and Christina Beardsley at the Spectrum Annual Conference in the Fairfield Halls Croydon on the 8th February 2011. A copy of this paper can be found on:

<http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

¹⁶ These are more fully discussed in Gilchrist, S. (2013), "A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach". This paper examines the Christian doctrines from the neurophysiological and psychological standpoints. Research and clinical practice has shown that the core concept of gender, in the sense of being who one is, is one of the first, (if not the first) general concept of self to be formed. It develops from birth. Attempts to fight it or to suppress it invariably fail and methods similar to those which are used to manage addiction or depression must be employed. However addiction and depression are compulsions of morbiditas which lead to oblivion or death. The compulsions associated with the gender conflict lead towards fulfilment and life. They grow stronger with age and gender reassignment is generally considered to be the inevitable outcome of the condition. Once it has been correctly assessed current psychiatric approaches concentrate on enabling ways of enabling the most effective and least disruptive transition.

¹⁷ This neurophysiological and psychological analysis has demonstrated that a duality exists in which the methods which are essential to manage the different types of conflict are almost opposite to one another. It is shown that any attempt to provide even well intentioned support, or to manage both gender and sexual variation when employing the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church which uses the conviction that these are invariably goal driven conflicts can produce very damaging counterproductive effects. (See also footnote 16)

The results of these investigations, the scientific research, and practical experience all indicate that the love and commitment which can be found in a marriage is not determined by gender identity or sexual orientation. While the Church held temporal power over the structures of society, its theology could not effectively be questioned. It is not science that should now be re-examined. It is the theology of the Church

Many people today are encountering social and theological difficulties. The Gospel of Christian Love enables us to address the hurt.

LEGALITIES

The case of *Corbett v Corbett*, which was heard in February 1970, and was decided in 1971, is a divorce case which established the legal precedent regarding the status of transsexual people in the United Kingdom. At the time the UK did not recognise mutual consent as a reason to dissolve a marriage, and Arthur Corbett, the plaintiff, sought to dissolve his marriage to the successful model April Ashley without the issue of inheritance rights. His case was brought under the premise that, since Ashley was born male (and should therefore be treated as male in perpetuity despite her change of sex) the marriage was void from the start. At the time, medical opinion on transsexuality was divided and no consensus on whether Ashley should be legally seen as male or female could be reached. Judge Ormrod ruled that she was a man/male for all legal purposes, therefore the marriage was void ab initio, and this was then used to define the sex of transsexual people for many purposes until the introduction of the Gender Recognition Act of 2004. This Act defines the sex of transsexual people to be whatever is on their birth certificate, until the point when a full Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is obtained under the same Act. The holder of a GRC may have a new birth certificate issued in their 'acquired' gender and is then treated as a full member of the reassigned sex. They can, therefore, marry someone of the opposite sex to their acquired sex and such marriages may be solemnized according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England in its parish churches subject to the usual protocols. Eight years ago, one of the workshop leaders married their male partner of forty-two years in their local church, following transition and gender recognition.

One of the huge disappointments of the Gender Recognition Act, and a cause of real dismay, was its requirement that someone who was married could only obtain full Gender Recognition after first divorcing their spouse. In this scenario, the applicant was issued with an interim GRC as a ground for divorce. After dissolving their marriage and obtaining a full GRC, the couple could then enter into a civil partnership. Under the Act, the disclosure of a person's past gender history without their consent by a public official is, with certain exceptions, a criminal act.

Civil partnerships were introduced in the United Kingdom under the Civil Partnership Act 2004. This enables same-sex couples to obtain essentially the same rights and responsibilities as civil marriage. Partners are entitled to the same property rights as married opposite-sex couples, the same exemption as married couples is given on inheritance tax, social security and pension benefits, and also the ability to obtain parental responsibility for a partner's children, as well as responsibility for reasonable maintenance of one's partner and their children, tenancy rights, full life insurance

recognition, next of kin rights in hospitals, and others. There is a formal process for dissolving partnerships akin to divorce.

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act of 2013 has legalised same-sex marriage starting from March 2014, although civil partnership still remain available. It is also planned to grant those in a civil partnership in England or Wales the ability to convert their partnership into a marriage. This Act also has implications for transgender marriages. Divorce is no longer required for the transsexual partner to acquire full gender recognition, but the Act has introduced spousal consent¹⁸ for gender recognition, and it has affected pension rights¹⁹. There is still significant anger in the trans community about these continuing inequalities.

Although many transsexual people decide to pursue permanent gender transition and to seek a Gender Recognition Certificate, others do not. There may be many reasons for this. Gender Identity represents only one facet of life and the objective may be to balance the commitments to a life one has built against the identity inside; however for that to succeed, the appropriate environments and effective methods of management are required²⁰. This applies to the second of the two workshop leaders who has been in a married relationship for 37 years. For people who do not have a Gender Recognition Certificate, little has legally changed since 1970. However the Gender Equality Act of 2010, together with the Transgender Equality Action Plan, which was published by the Government Equalities Office in December 2011, lay out actions which address some of the specific challenges that such transgender people can face in their daily lives.

¹⁸ The Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act that progressed through Parliament contained an amendment to the Gender Recognition Act 2004 which means that if a married person wishes to transition and gain their full Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC), they must gain the consent of their spouse for the marriage to continue. This may be highly problematic as it effectively gives a huge amount of control over the issuing of the full GRC to the spouse. In an ideal world, where everyone takes the news of their partner wishing to transition extremely well, then this wouldn't be a massive hurdle, however things may not be so simple. If the spouse of a transitioning partner dug their heels in, they could quite easily drag out divorce proceedings in an effort to frustrate and hinder. There is now evidence that the spousal veto is likely to be misused by those who do not want their trans spouse to transition. Such quarrels may be regrettable and sad, but it is argued that these are issues that should be settled between the two partners without any legislation being involved.
<http://www.c4em.org.uk/drop-the-spousal-veto/>

¹⁹ Prior to the enactment of this legislation people who would have preferred to continue their marriage may have already dissolved their marriage as a requirement to obtain gender recognition, and it is likely that people in that situation will have then registered a civil partnership to replace their lost marriage. Under the new legislation they will in future be able to convert that civil partnership to a marriage, but that marriage will in effect be backdated to the date they registered the civil partnership. However, that will still leave them in a position where they have been married twice, with an unmarried gap between those marriages. It is argued that this legislation could be amended to provide, where a couple dissolved their marriage to obtain gender recognition and subsequently registered a civil partnership, that on converting that civil partnership to a marriage, that marriage could be treated as having started at the start of their original marriage, in effect restoring the continuity of their marriage from the time that it was first made.

²⁰ Management methods are discussed in Gilchrist, S. (2013), "A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach".

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 the option until the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

An elderly married couple, one of whom 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 until the point that they become full-time.

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).

SOME QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS & CONSIDERATIONS

After a description and discussion of the various scenarios the following questions were addressed: 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 people 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 when one partner transitions? What are the reasons why

couples separate at this point? How essential is gender to marriage? How should we define heterosexuality and homosexuality – should it be in absolute terms, seeking to complement the other, seeking the similar or what?

THEOLOGY

The Church of England's 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 marriage? Is marriage a sacrament? Can trans people's marriages reflect the union of Christ and the Church?

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

All agreed that transgender people and their relationships posed major challenges to the conventional perceptions of gender and of sex. One person observed that it was humbling to hear people speak openly about their lives, especially as societal norms supports a majority who barely have to think about their gender and sexuality. It was also noted that current United Kingdom legislation is expressed in ways which enshrine the distinctions between husband and wife, male and female, using terms within the documentation that may not be applicable to trans peoples marriages and relationships. New Zealand's introduction of gender free marriage was cited and this was recommended as a better approach.

The hardships and the challenges of the journey which transsexuals are required to follow was also noted and issues of conflict resolution were discussed. Research suggests that about half the number of those who were in a relationship before they decided to transition had maintained their relationship. Of the relationships which did not survive after the transition, only about half report that their transition was the reason for separation. Transgender marriages can, and do, survive through the gender transition of one of the partners, but for this to happen it is essential that the appropriate understanding and support is given. Thus it follows that the forthcoming Church of England Shared Discussions on gender and sexuality should not only consider the theological issues: they must also address the pastoral concerns which are needed in providing understanding, care and support

A question was asked early on about whether the presence of children could help couples to stay together during transition. It was noted that a wide variety of reaction can be encountered. Some children are very supportive while others may reject the transitioning partner. A case was mentioned where one child would only describe the transitioning partner as "it". Parents are also protective of their children because of the fear of bullying at school. The age of children is an important factor and no general rule can be applied.

The spousal consent to gender recognition which is required by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 was discussed. This has been questioned by some trans

people. However Professor Stephen Whittle²¹ has pointed out the importance of consent as an essence of marriage (as was also emphasised in the two conference presentations by Charlotte Methuen and Adrian Thatcher) and the need for a spouse to consent to the change in their marriage from a heterosexual to same sex marriage should be an absolute requirement for any meaningful relationship to continue to exist.

The marriage scenarios, which were read out by the group to inform the discussion, demonstrate a very wide range of experiences. The need to obtain a GRC for those people who do not intend to marry was discussed, and it was noted that some trans people decide not apply for a GRC even after they have transitioned. One person cited the problem of people who have to revert to wearing the clothes for their birth gender to travel (because they have not yet changed documents). However it was pointed out that most documents, apart from the birth certificate, can be changed without a GRC being obtained. Other issues discussed were the losses of transition, e.g. the loss of one's place within the gay community for those who had identified as same sex attracted before one of the partners had transitioned. A further issue considered was the role which migration played in trans people's journeys: Some transgender people have chosen to move to another physical location and start a new life as part of their processes of transition; however many people now transition where they are. The people who properly prepared for their transition and informed friends and relatives often receive a great deal of support, but could equally face total rejection. Sometimes parents insist on using pre-transition names and pronouns even after the transition had occurred. In some cases this could just be due to the difficulty of adjustment, but in other instances a point was being made. Rejection by the Churches was often a major issue. The case of an Alpha team refusing to pray for the Holy Spirit for a trans person was cited. Language use also lags behind people's experience and self-understanding. It was recognised that the need to attentively listen to people's self-definitions is a key element in completing and understanding the gender transition. Transsexuals face a difficult and a challenging journey, and these are some of the issues that must be addressed.

One of the major issues faced is that of marriage and romantic relationships when a transgendered partner is involved. The research, the scenarios and counselling experience all support the conclusion that marriages and romantic relationships can and do survive the processes of gender reassignment, and that the values and love involved are able to transcend both gender and sex. Part of the purpose of any marriage may be to give social stability, and for procreation, but transgender and intersex experiences can also demonstrate that the essence of a marriage is also about love, faithfulness and the commitments of life.

In the questions which were set for discussion it was asked: "Can trans people's marriages reflect the union of Christ and the Church?" The theological point was expressed in the discussion that all people made in the image of God. So, as with St. Paul in Galatians 3:28 "there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus". Transgender and intersex experiences also challenge the boundaries which society imposes, which label and define both gender and sex. If it is accepted

²¹ Stephen Whittle is a transgender activist with the organization Press for Change. Since 2007, he has been professor of Equalities Law in the School of Law at Manchester Metropolitan University.

that heterosexual marriages “reflect the union of Christ and the Church” then the destabilising of these boundaries suggests that the same of acceptance must be applied to all marriages, heterosexual, same-sex and transgender alike²².

POSTSCRIPT

This workshop provides an ongoing contribution to ongoing work of the Sibyls in the exploration of issues concerned with gender identity, sexuality and spirituality. A major contribution to this is the Sibyls' “Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality Workshop”²³ in which one of this workshop's leaders, Christina Beardsley, is closely involved, and these workshops have been held with many LGBT Christian organisations and in the training of spiritual directors. Some who participated in the workshops had an early awareness both of their sexual orientation and of their faith in God and Jesus' love, but generally, people described experiencing a process of self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-acceptance, in which sexuality came to be seen as a gift, contrary to its demanded rejection by the Church. In time, sexuality and spirituality came together, and sexuality, gender and spirituality intertwined. Within the groups some people expressed an overwhelming sense of being whole and of being able to express who they really were. For others there was a desire to live beyond boundaries, especially the restrictions associated with a gender binary expected by society and enforced by the Church.

The results of these experiential workshops suggest that the failure of the Church to accept gender and sexually variant people as being whole people is a cause of much of the difficulty. In particular, it divides them into categories which are separated by gender and sex. The decision in the Pilling Report to exclude transgender people from its remit, while examining gay and lesbian interests, is an example of this categorisation and the leaders of this workshop believe this to be a major fault. Christina Beardsley provides a detailed analysis of the Pilling Report where these and other concerns, are addressed²⁴. However the need for such a categorisation

²²For a more extended discussion about gender relationships in marriage and Adelphopoiesis or “Brother Making” in the early Christian Church see sections 8 and 9 of 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 this paper can be found on: <http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

²³Beardsley, C. O'Brien, M. Wooley, J. (2013). “Exploring the Interplay: The Sibyls' Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality” Workshop” *Theology & Sexuality*, Volume 16, Number 3 /2010. January 14, 2013 Maney Publishing. DOI: 10.1558/tse.v16i3.259. ISSN (print) 1355-8358 (online) 1745-8350. This is an interactive workshop which builds on trans, queer and intersex perspectives. An exploration of identity, role and practice, it requires honesty and attentive listening from participants. Produced for a day conference at St Anne's, Soho in 2007, it has been offered (and developed) with LGBT Christian organizations, the LGBT Health Summits 2010 and 2011, and the York Spiritual Directors' Course in 2012 and 2013. Originally a trans-led workshop, at more recent events leaders have identified as lesbian, gay, and trans, and 'spirituality' has always been broadly defined. This article outlines the background to the workshop, its genesis and contents, before discussing the major themes that emerged on these occasions. The authors commend the carefully-managed group listening exercise, and the "interplay" model "identity-role-practice" devised by Michelle O'Brien, as templates for the wider listening process in the Anglican Communion in the hope that it will include gender identity and spirituality in addition to sexuality.

²⁴ Beardsley, C. (2014).” The Pilling Report: A Detailed Analysis by Christina Beardsley, for Changing Attitude, England”. January 25th, 2014 <http://changingattitude.org.uk/archives/7814>

has been present from the earliest days of the Christian Church; because, in a patriarchal, male dominated and despotic society, the expression of any true gender equality, or any form of gender and sexual variance which departed from the prevailing values within that society²⁵, especially between citizens, was a politically threatening act. Thatcher²⁶ identifies the primary driving forces creating the doctrines of gender complementarity and the rejection of all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour as coming from the gender politics of first century Greco/Roman society. There is a strong irony inside paragraph 147 of the Pilling Report, when it states that: “But the most effective missionaries, following the example of St Paul, have always sought aspects of the indigenous culture which they could affirm and thus lead their hearers deeper into Christ”. Gilchrist²⁷ discusses the pragmatic steps the Christian Church was required to take in order to spread its message to the wider world. Methuen²⁸ illustrates how the gender transcendence in the original teaching of Jesus became transformed into the doctrines of gender complementarity from the adoption of largely Stoic doctrines prevalent in the host Greco/Roman society. Starting from a neurophysiological and psychological analysis Gilchrist²⁹ shows that what are regarded today as the traditional teaching of the Christian Churches on gender and sexual variance cannot be correctly described as such³⁰. Inappropriate management can cause considerable harm.

These results require major changes and reassessments of the traditional Christian teaching on gender and sexual variance. However it is even more important that their arguments are heard, than just that they are correct. Gilchrist³¹ describes the Church of England’s recent responses and reaction to the current day controversies in regard to marriage, gender and sex. A meeting of the Church of England College of Bishops took place in September 2014 to examine these issues. Neither of the representatives which the LGBTI Anglican Coalition³² had been asked to nominate were invited to be involved in the preparation for this meeting. Four people from LGBTI groups were each asked to speak to the meeting for ten minutes about their experience. They had some opportunity to interact with the bishops but they were not invited to stay for the remainder of the meeting. So far, there has been no

²⁵ Understanding the dynamics of first century society is crucial. For a full discussion see Gilchrist, S. (2013). “An Unfinished Reformation”. Copies of these papers can be found on:

<http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

²⁶ Thatcher, Adrian. (2014): “In Favour Of ‘Equal Marriage” in the ‘To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage’ Conference, held on Saturday 27th September 2014 at St John’s Church, Waterloo, London. www.lgbtac.org.uk . For more background information see: Thatcher, Adrian. (2011). “God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction”. Wiley, 2011 ISBN 1444396366, 9781444396362

²⁷ 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>

²⁸ Methuen, Charlotte (2014) “Marriage in history and tradition” in the ‘To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage’ Conference held on Saturday 27th September 2014 at St John’s Church, Waterloo, London www.lgbtac.org.uk

²⁹ 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: Copies of these papers can be found on:

<http://www.gndr.org.uk/transgender/articles/index.htm>

³⁰ See footnote 29

³¹ 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>

³² For more information see the Coalition’s website www.lgbtac.org.uk

consultation with the Coalition, as had been promised, about the resources to be used, and four resource papers prepared for the forthcoming Shared Conversations have been commissioned without reference to any LGBTI organisations. If the topic under discussion were the place of black people in the church, respecting the principle of 'no conversation about us without us' would be seen to be self-evidently necessary. The Pilling Report had recommended facilitated conversations. However the limited research and the uncritical use of the scientific and theological evidence which it cites only serve to move the orbit of debate into a more comfortable space. There appears to be little willingness to listen, or to study in the necessary depth. Dr Chris Cook's article in the Church Times of the 19th September 2014 correctly criticised the limited and indiscriminate use of scientific data. The experiences of LGBTI organisations confirm the reluctance of the Bishops to engage directly with LGBTI people and their associations in meaningful discussions. Without effective processes of engagement, the credibility of, and the believability in Christianity will continue to be eroded in the eyes of the world.