

Science and Theology in Religious Traditions by Susan Gilchrist

Changing Attitude Newsletter: October 2016

The last two months have seen significant changes to the LGBTI Landscape with the completion of the Shared Conversations Process and the setting up the Bishops Sexuality group, which may bring changes of good or ill. In the press conference Pope Francis gave after his visit to Georgia, he seems to indicate that the morality of transgender relationships should be taken on a case by case basis, which leads towards even greater ambiguities in the interpretation of the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church, which he still resolutely supports: he now seems to be holding increasingly contradictory positions and one wonders when the break point will come.

It has always seemed to me that the whole framework of the shared-conversations process has been faulty, because the conversations seem to have been enclosed in the bubbles of their own theologies. There is little critical consideration, or properly conducted analyses of the foundations upon which the development of gender and sexually variant identities are based. In my opinion and those of others, the scientific arguments the Christian Churches have presented, including that in the Pilling Report, contain little of the objective balance that any scientific study requires. There is no doubt that there was a great deal of sexual abuse in first century society where the blatant abuses of power gave permission for extreme abuses of sex, most notably same-sex acts of sex. However to condemn all gender and sexually variant behaviour for the abuses of some, is akin to saying today that all members of a minority group are terrorists, because some engage in terrorist acts.



There are some moves to link science, religion, gender identity and sexuality. One of the most recent was the University of Durham/Royal College of Psychiatrist Conference held on the 19th to the 20th September 2016. Papers presented included ones by Jack Drescher on Causes and Because: Aetiological Theories of Homosexuality, Michel King on the possible origins of increased prevalence of mental disorder in LGBT people, John Dehlin on the pathways to mental health for LGBTQ Mormons, Pamela Gawler-Wright on Policy and Ethics; Chris Cook and Robert Strong on issues of Science and Theology. These papers demonstrate the harm hurt and pain that can be created by the use of inappropriate management methods and treatments, the need to challenge and change traditional narratives and the need for safe spaces where these can be developed and discussed. My own contribution to the conference is available on <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/durham2016.htm>.

As a member of the Corrymeela community in Northern Ireland I have been able to build on the research work undertaken by the community into the development of personal and tribal identities in violent conflict. This personal work demonstrates the identity driven nature of

gender and sexually variant behaviour. Therefore the duality which enables those gender and sexually variant people to express these truths in their lives according to the highest principles of morality should be celebrated, while those who do not should be unambiguously condemned for the abuses they create. This conclusion is supported by a separate social, theological and historical study. These studies together demonstrate that this duality is inherent to the condition. This means that its principles should be present in all societies and all traditions at all times, and that contradicts the traditional teaching of the Christian Church.

I am currently writing this article on a sunny Sunday morning at the Corrymeela Centre at Ballycastle in Northern Ireland, having put the final touches to a liturgy for use during the Transgender Day of Remembrance on the 20th November 2016. In this service those transgender people who have been murdered or died during 2015/2016 because of hate against them are remembered. That liturgy is available now on the Corrymeela website at www.corrymeela.org/tdor2016 . It is intended for widespread distribution.

I would also like to draw your attention to the following event "Blessed are the Brave": a weekend for LGBT life affirming faith leaders. This will be held at the Corrymeela Centre at Ballycastle in Northern Ireland from the 20th – 22nd January, 2017. Each year Corrymeela welcomes new and repeat participants on a weekend designed specifically for faith leaders from the Christian traditions who are inclusive of the lives, relationships and leadership of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. Time is spent in reflection together, in learning, reflecting on biblical texts, day to day stories, and offering encouragement and support. Additionally, at these retreats at Corrymeela offers tools and learning, derived from the many years of responding to sectarianism, that are relevant for people who are engaging in dialogue about LGBT lives within the life of the Christian churches. This weekend is not only for those who are LGBT themselves, but for those Christian faith leaders who are inclusive of LGBT people. For more details see the website: <http://www.corrymeela.org/events/71/blessed-are-the-brave-corrymeela>

Gender and sexual variant people are fellow travellers in their interaction with societies and the same conflict dynamics occur. However being transgender is no indication of sexual orientation. A major feature of hurt amongst transgender people is the breakup of heterosexual marriages which were made prior to transition, when the need for one of the partners to transition occurs. Often the love that was built into that marriage still remains. Please pray for those who find themselves in that situation at the present time.

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