

Reflection for the Transgender Day of Remembrance: Let us be Our Selves

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In the United Kingdom, between 2016 and 2017 reports of transphobic hate crime have risen by 180 percent. There were only 19 prosecutions for transphobic hate crimes during this period, despite this huge rise to 582 incidents. Two transgender people have committed suicide while in custody in United Kingdom prisons. One transgender person is leaving for New Zealand because this is considered a safer place to live. Concern about the widespread nature of persecution and discrimination of transgender people has already been raised in the United Kingdom Parliament. These are just some of the incidents that have been reported: Joanna Jamel, senior lecturer in criminology at London's Kingston University, told the Independent: *"There's a dark figure of unreported and unrecorded crimes and we'll never know what that true figure is"*. The nature of this secular scapegoating and persecution is not helped by those doctrines of the Christian Church which decree that sexuality and gender identity are God-given attributes and that any departure, for any purpose, from their divinely created male and female stereotypes is always a falling from grace, which pursues inappropriate sexual desires and is a grievous sin. In various States of the United States the legitimacy of the identities of all transgender people is being denied by the passing of legislation which demands that all transgender people use facilities according to the gender identity assigned to them at birth, regardless of the gender identity they possess, and any physical transformations they have made. Not only is this being supported by groups of protestant evangelical Christians, it is also being supported by senior Prelates in the Roman Catholic Church. President Trump is trying to reinstate the ban on transgender people serving in the military. With the support of various Christian and Church groups, and under his watch, other legal protections are being rescinded. Providing appropriate care for transgender children is also being rejected for the same reasons.

The ideas behind the Christian doctrine that transgender and sexual identities are the result of lifestyle choices which are promoted by the pursuit of inappropriate desires are rejected by a worldwide consensus of modern science. In the Western world, the great majority of professional medical and psychological institutions currently regard both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life. That is supported by the lived experience of transgender people. The reasons behind their overriding compulsions to seek gender reassignment are usually not to become a man or a woman, instead it is to be able to be true to their own selves in their everyday lives. Some may willingly engage in sex work, others can be forced into it because their economic circumstances give them no alternative. Because it fulfils a search for identity and not behaviour, as wide a range of moral attitudes, loyalties and commitments are found amongst the transgender community as in the population at large. Some of the people beside you may be transgender, yet you could never tell from the away they live their lives. After transition many merge invisibly into society in their new roles, but that still does not stop them from being rejected, discriminated against or condemned by society for being who they are, or from being made victims of harassment and guilt by the traditional doctrines of Christian Church. For transsexuals the suicide rate is 8 to 10 times higher than that of the general population. A recent report, which studied 3700 people, shows that more than four in five transgender young people have self-harmed and more than two in five transgender young people have attempted to take their own lives. There is a fundamental contradiction between science and theology, but up to now major religious traditions have put an absolute embargo on even considering the possibility of change to the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church.

Each year on the Transgender Day of Remembrance we commemorate all transgender people who have been murdered by others for being who they are, or who have taken their own lives because of the persecution they have endured. If this remembering is to be genuine we must also accept and recognise our own contributions to their harassment, and that must include a reassessment of the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church. A commentary, where these doctrines are examined has been prepared. This is available at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/013B-HearingWithoutListening.pdf>. A meditation, which is based on the Prayer of St Francis, and suggested Intercessions are also provided. In the role of Jesus as the suffering servant the true message of the Gospel is revealed. As we reflect on these and as we hear the list of names of those who transgender people who have been murdered or who have taken their own lives because of the harassment of others, as Jesus died on the cross for us, he also died for these people too.

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