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Mozaik Editorial

Everybody has one, but nobody talks about it. Without it, no one would exist. People disagree whether it’s a choice or you’re born with it. And it can be dangerous enough to warrant prohibition in many of the worlds’ countries. What is the answer to this mysterious riddle? Well, as you can probably guess from the cover, it’s sexuality. It is something which affects every person in the world, and yet it is rarely discussed openly, except with condemnation or embarrassment.

In this issue of Mozaik, we decided to follow wscf Europe’s lead and break the taboo. We will be discussing many issues relating to sexuality. However, sexuality is not just something we experience; it is also something we study, and think about in relation to faith. For this reason, this 36th issue of Mozaik is divided into two sections: Heart and Mind.

Heart is based on sharing our experiences of sexuality and faith; whether this relates to growing up as the trans child of a minister and rediscovering your own faith, like in our spotlight article In or Out from trainee minister Alex Scott Young, or the shifting boundaries of modern relationships from Chaplaincy Assistant Ella Sibley in “This is my Partner…” Knut Svihus shares his story of coming out… as a Christian! Meanwhile Rob Howe and Pierre Thierry reflect on masculinity and gay sexuality, and Carla Grosch-Miller shares a lesson from a conference from the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality.

In Mind we learn about scripture’s take on this topic, so crucial to our very existence. Does the Bible set out to prohibit sexuality? This shibboleth issue is discussed by expert on LGBT issues Dr K. Renato Lings, who shares amazing insights on same-sex love in the Bible. Hadje Sadje asks whether women are empowered or denigrated by stories about them in the Old Testament. Are they Texts of Terror or Liberation? Reflecting on the Budapest conference, Hoi Tung Ng discusses whether transgender issues should be viewed as medical problems. And, reprinting an article from Mozaik 26, we investigate one of the most taboo topics of all time: Understanding the Mystery of Clerical Sexual Abuse.

I hope this issue raises, and answers, some questions in your mind, so that we can fully understand one of the mysteries of our shared humanity: sex.

Blessings,

James Jackson

Mozaik Editor-in-Chief

—— James Jackson

James Jackson is a teacher, DJ and editor based in Liverpool, UK. He has a Masters Degree in Religion & Political Life, and enjoys travelling, food and music.
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Heart

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In or Out

— Alex Scott Clare-YounG

MY STORY

Liminal, transformative and exciting are all words that are used to describe training for ministry. We are often reminded that we are on a journey. My journey towards ministry started about 20 years ago. I grew up as the child of a minister, and knew how to dress and behave exactly as expected. My journey towards transition also started about 20 years ago. I grew up as the child of a minister, and every Sunday morning my parents had to struggle to get me into my “Sunday best” and every Sunday afternoon, so I am told, I changed straight back into my trackies as soon as possible.

Fast forward 20 years and I am in a different place altogether. I have been transitioning from female towards male for six years now, and am a much more confident, happy, capable human being. I have also been journeying in my faith, and began to train for ministry last year. I believe in a God who creates us anew every time we open our eyes (and our minds). I believe in a Spirit that breathes into the world to transform individuals and communities. I believe in a Christ who lives out God’s Word of justice and peace, and I believe that I am called to lead by following and by asking questions. There is a big question, though, that refuses to be answered easily: in or out?
Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” (John 18:36 – 38)

1 All Bible quotes NRSV

A lot of lesbian and gay people will be able to tell you the story of the first time they came out. After that, there are lots of little coming out moments, when introducing a new partner, for example. For bisexual and transgender people, it is a little different. If we are — as I am — in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender, then we are perceived to be heterosexual. I am marrying the person who I want to spend the rest of my life with next week. It is such a joyful experience. And yet, for both of us there is that tension between expressing our love for — and commitment to — one another, and not being able to visibly express our fullest identities.

There are lots of different coming out moments as someone who is transgender, and I believe that many of these
are, or lead to, microaggressions. A microagression¹ is a repeated small or casual degradation which builds up to create more trauma than a larger incident. There was the time when, in a casual conversation with a stranger, I was asked what school I had gone to. I gave the true answer — a private school for girls — without thinking, and the stranger said that they would pray for me, and promptly left. The time when I went to get my hair cut and the barber said that they didn’t cut girls’ hair. The time when I had to ask to use the accessible toilet in a train station, where the gents only had urinals. Each of these moments was embarrassing, awkward and slightly painful. Each had the potential to wear away at my self-confidence and make me nervous in public situations. These moments still happen. I don’t think that they will ever stop.

¹ Coined by Chester M. Pierce in 1970
These moments exist in church life too — moments where I have to decide whether to tell the truth, when doing so would mean coming out, or to tell a lie and hide who I really am for the sake of a quiet life. Jesus also suffered a lot of microagressions for having integrity and living out his true identity. I wonder if they added to the pain of the cross.

**LIVING IN — MICRO - IDENTITIES**

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*  
*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*  
*(John 10:10)*

Living in, though, threatens to split up my identity into little boxes. One box would have the label “Christian Alex”, another would be “trans Alex”, another might be “musician Alex” or “partner Alex”. The boxes would need to be stored in separate rooms, behind closed doors. Some of them would have to have a padlock on them. I don’t think that that is what Jesus meant when he said that he came that we might have life in all its fullness or abundance. Living abundantly means being generous with our truths, open with our identities and challenging with our words and actions.

Living in, ultimately, might be the answer for some people, but it isn’t for me. I need to take each coming out decision one at a time and make sure that I am always speaking the truth to power, in love, and with the hope of renewal and kingdom building here on earth. God’s kingdom will not be built if we are all hiding in boxes, too scared to use the tools that we have been given.
A Q U E E R C A L L I N G?

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

(Luke 4:18 – 19)

And I do believe that, as a transgender Christian, I have been given a pretty special set of tools. Each of us has our own unique identity that is God-born and has transformative power. Our identities are where many of our tools and gifts hide.

The first ever service that I led was about LGBTQ identity. My story has opened conversations up that have brought hurting people to God and brought hurtful people to their knees. It is only from a place of oppression that we can follow Jesus’ example of breaking chains and setting prisoners free.

And yet, it is not only the LGBTQ community that I am called to work with. I have worked with the homeless, the sick, the elderly, and the poor. In all likelihood I will spend a lot of my time working with the wealthy, the privileged and people of all sexualities and genders, including those who are cisgender² and heterosexual. My identity is part of that too. No, I don’t talk about being trans in all of the services

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² Whose gender identity is the same as their birth sex
I lead — frankly, it is very rare that I do. I do, however, have empathy and understanding for all people who have suffered at the hands of others, who have had doubts about who they are, who find life complicated and confusing, and who sometimes fall to their knees in desperate prayers for help.

I am called as a whole person — and that includes my identity as someone who is transgender. It includes my past, my present and my future. It hurts and worries me to think that my calling might be undermined or denied by those who think that my identity is inherently more sinful than theirs. It concerns me that I might have trouble finding a church. Even writing this article makes me nervous. However, I can’t and won’t be silent, or hide. As a child of God, I know whose judgement matters, and I want to stand before God as a whole person, a person of integrity and of honesty. A person who admits my sin and frailty, but who knows that being myself is not wrong.

**IN OR OUT?**

*There is no longer Jew or Greek,*  
*there is no longer slave or free,*  
*there is no longer male and female;*  
*for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28)

So, what is the answer, in or out? The answer is that, like gender, it isn’t a binary choice. God did not create a binary gender — male or female. God created a scale — male and female, living together in unity with all that is in-between and outside of them. Similarly, God does not shape our lives into neat little binary decisions. I won’t be in or out, I will be both. I will speak the truth when it will do good — when it will help to undermine oppression, when it will show another human being that they are good enough in God’s eyes. And I will be in when quietness is the right answer, when words would only wound, when there is time for peace and stillness. Out or in? Trans or Cis? Gay or straight? No. None of these. All of these. Simply called.

— Alex Scott Clare-Young

Alex Scott Clare-Young is currently training for ministry in Cambridge. He is married to Jo, also an ordinand. He is passionate about social justice and enjoys reading, writing and catching Pokemon in his spare time. He is a 90s kid after all.
“This is my Partner...”

Student sexuality and the redefinition of relationship

— ELLA SIBLEY, ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN, UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON, LONDON
At a party recently I got chatting to someone and then they said these words: “this is my partner.” Once upon a time I could reasonably have expected to meet their work colleague; later this term began to be used by lesbian and gay people to describe the person they were intending to spend the rest of their life with; but on this occasion, I heard it from a twenty-something man to refer to the woman he was romantically involved with — they’d been together less than three months. The rapidity with which the geography and milestones of romantic relationships are changing can leave many feeling confused and even worried, but my work has opened my eyes to the generation who are putting honesty, empowerment and love at the centre, as together they rewrite the road-map.

Romantic relationships come in all shapes and sizes, but there are some things we can all agree on; a “healthy” relationship should include respect, trust, affection, good communication, mutual appreciation and a certain “Je ne sais quoi” — the “spark” or “chemistry” — the electricity that defies definition, but is instantly recognisable once felt or observed. So far, we can all agree; but there are some relationship characteristics that are disagreed upon. The “correct” genders of partners and their respective sexual orientations are endlessly and fiercely debated. The recent mass shooting in Orlando, Florida is tragic proof that homophobia is still rife. This, of course, is an extreme example; but it is still quite common to hold, or encounter others who hold, the belief that the “correct” form of romance is between a heterosexual, cis-gendered man and woman exclusively.

There are obvious points of agreement and obvious points of disagreement which I could comment on, but instead, I choose the third option. What are the milestones in a relationship? My conversations with students and my own experience leads me to give this (not exhaustive) list: marriage or civil partnership, engagement, sex, “merging finances,” moving in together, falling in love, having children, “going public” and exclusivity. Most would agree that these represent different levels in a relationship — that the addition or subtraction of any one of these significantly changes the dynamic of the relationship. I have tried to deliberately list these in a non-chronological order, for very good reason — this is my “third option,” the non-obvious point of disagreement that is changing the way young people are forming relationships. As an example, please do find someone and ask them to arrange those milestones into the time-line of a relationship — I can almost guarantee that they will have a different idea of the “normal” progression of a relationship from you.

Indeed, it was over this very issue that I found a group of good friends vehemently arguing in Chapel recently.

“I couldn’t possibly marry someone before living with them — I couldn’t really know someone until then!”

“There’s nothing wrong with having sex before being in an “official’ relationship with someone — it can just be about fun.”

“I wouldn’t even call it a relationship unless I thought I was in love with them.”

So why is there such disagreement? Why is what’s normal for one, considered taboo by another, and idiotic by a third? It’s a massive question, but I can offer a few ideas from my experience. The University of Roehampton is in South-West London and has students from over 140 different countries – the huge mix of cultural backgrounds accounts for a fair amount of the variation in opinion. I’ve met students who are expecting arranged marriages, students who never want to get married, students who won’t have sex before marriage and lots who won’t have marriage before sex — much of this is due to the expectations they formed as children, by observing those around them.
Religion also, of course, plays a large part, and it's important to recognise this as separate from culture or upbringing. I've met “born-again virgins” — those who, upon converting to a certain denomination of Christianity, reclaim an identity as a virgin and thereafter refrain from sex before marriage. I also spoke to a student earlier this year, who, after much prayer, believed that God was leading him to change his opinion on physical relationships before marriage. Clearly these are not issues of upbringing, but instead born of a living faith.

The other major trends play out on a much wider field and over longer spans of time — the invention of hormonal birth control, the empowerment of women, extended life expectancy, more time spent in education and the lengthening of “adolescence” have all led to changing patterns of relationship.

A final consideration worth mentioning is one I see first-hand in London — the cost of housing. It may sound trivial, but with average rent in London being over double the national average, it is a prime consideration for those moving out of university halls and into the private market. I see many students rush into living with a partner for this reason, and it is becoming more common to live with someone for years before marriage.

The students arguing in chapel over the relationship road-map will not be the first, nor last, to have this discussion — who among us hasn't been surprised by an unexpected house-warming invitation, an unlooked-for pregnancy announcement, or the sight of one half of a couple being repeatedly asked “so when are you two going to finally tie the knot?” But what struck me about their conversation was the vehemence with which they held to their beliefs, contrasted with the acceptance they had for each other’s.

Jesus gave the commandment to “love thy neighbour” or “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” My work with secular students has led me to believe they have a different “golden rule,” one that, on the surface, seems
almost identical. It can be basically summed up as “do no harm,” but I more often hear a colloquial version that sounds something like: “if you’re happy, and you’re not hurting anyone, then that’s fine.”

In actuality, these statements are hugely different; one is based upon doing good for others, the other upon doing no harm to others. Perhaps controversially, many of my students have lost patience with Jesus’ commandment — they believe it leads to intolerance, particularly around issues of sexuality.

The merits of Jesus’ way over the secular golden rule are obvious when it comes to most injustices — if you pass a beggar on the street with the mantra “love thy neighbour” in your head, you may well stop to give money; meanwhile “do no harm” will allow you to walk by. And this example highlights a major difference in the approaches. “Love thy neighbour” forces us to be responsible for one another, to become brothers and sisters. Whereas “do no harm” is the perfect mantra for our increasingly individualised society; the only person you’re responsible for is yourself.

And it’s particularly on the issue of sexuality that the two approaches grate on one another — Christians are perceived as trying to meddle in the private lives of others when they make moral judgements, or even simply try to give advice on relationships and sexuality. Hence many of my secular students have lost patience with “love thy neighbour” — believing it leads to intolerance.

But doing unto others as you would have them do unto you has to begin with sympathy. If I literally gave others the things that I desire for myself, I probably wouldn’t do much good in the world, and a few ludicrous examples should prove this. My favourite food is pasta, but I shouldn’t try to feed it to someone who’s gluten-intolerant; I thoroughly dislike going to the gym, but that doesn’t mean I should start closing them down. Instead, we must each put ourselves in the shoes of another — “if I was them, what would I want?” And it’s here that Jesus’ advice trumps that of the secular world, because if we get it right, we can engage with others on a deeper level. Most of my pastoral work with students is listening to them talk about navigating romantic relationships — it’s a huge privilege to be allowed into this area of their lives and have the opportunity to be a force for good there.

There is a way to do good when listening and advising on relationships that doesn’t involve meddling or moralising, and it actually takes us back to the start. Romantic relationships come in all shapes and sizes, but there are some things we can all agree on; a “healthy” relationship should include respect, trust, affection, good communication, mutual appreciation and a certain “Je ne sais quoi.” In my work with students, these are the things I focus on — it doesn’t matter what my opinions are on sex before marriage, or sexual orientation, or cohabitation. We must be open to others using different road-maps, as long as they have a healthy relationship with the partner with whom they share the journey.

And I believe we can do this while maintaining an authentic Christian identity, because that list (respect, trust, etc.) doesn’t simply cover the necessary qualities of romance, but of all relationships. We can easily apply those qualities to a friend, sibling, even colleague. Even chemistry, which is often thought of as a sexual energy, can be applied elsewhere, because that spark can take other forms; the identical sense of humour of best friends, or the creativity in “bouncing ideas” with a colleague. But, most obviously, this definition can be applied to our relationship with God — our first relationship, because he loved us first, even before our birth. A relationship with the spark of living faith. When listening and advising others we can encourage love, trust and finding the spark, all while pointing to the God who is the source of all these.
Have you ever thought about how it is to always come out of the closet each time you make a new friend, business partner, or colleague? As the slogan pictures it: it does get better, and simpler, each time you do it. At the same time you have to do it; you have to share a private detail of your personal life with new people. I show the signs, it isn’t especially difficult to see what I am, but I still have to tell people and very often defend my position.

Oh, you were thinking about me being gay? Well I am gay, but I was thinking more about the fact that I am both a Christian and gay. Each day I start by putting a necklace with a silver cross around my neck. God is with me and strengthens me every day, but my belief also makes an interesting conversation both at my workplace, at my university, and in the line when waiting for my turn to buy a beer at my regular bar. So many people ask me why I can believe in something so unbelievable. People ask me why I can believe in something that causes distress and agony for so many of my “own” people.

When I go to a church service on Sunday I get asked if my female friend is my wife, when she in fact is more interested in their wives than in me. The guys are commenting how beautiful the girls in the room are, and that they would like to date them all. I nod and cough something confirming...
while I try to find a different topic to talk about. Quite often I manage to reveal my true identity by a mistake and the silence usually spreads as fast as the common cold. “So you are gay, and a Christian?” Yes I am. “You like men more than you like women?” Yes I do. “But you said you are a Christian, isn’t that a contradiction?” No it isn’t at all.

In the public debate it is interesting for the media to publish the voices of the most polarized sides. The polarized sides of a debate generates a larger amount of revenue through advertising. We hear about those who will abolish all forms of religious belief so religious conservative voices will be silenced. We also hear those who want queer people to repent and be saved from the fire of hell. We hear very little about the vast majority in the middle. Those who want all of us to live a life in respect and love, and who agree to disagree. The public debate shapes how we act and react to each other in our everyday life.

When I find myself in a new Christian community I bring with me the thoughts of the most extreme voices. The voices that tells me that my life is a sin and that my love to another man is an abomination. I immediately go into a defensive position. I do not express my faith in the way I should because I am afraid to be shut down, even though I know that I will probably never experience such a reaction. I am afraid to show my whole personality just so that I do not need to come out of the closet one more time.

Even though the Norwegian parliament only just divided the relations between the state and the church, Norway is a secular country. Religious belief is thought to be a private or personal aspect of your life. Sexuality on the other hand is also something personal, but it is much more shown through romantic expressions between two persons. In that way it is also much more accepted in many ways than religious belief. When I end up in discussions or conversations with other individuals identifying as lgbtqi-persons the thing they most often react to is that I’m a Christian. They especially react when I say that I am the leader of a student Christian organisation (Bergen Kristelige Studentforbund). I usually don’t want to assume other people’s opinions, but I feel when I’m in those situations that their first thought is that I must be stupid and ignorant person. I do understand them; what has Christianity done for them lately? It has given them agony and it has been used to legitimize oppression of them. I must be a lesser person than them to have chosen such a path for my life.

Recently I was fortunate to have the opportunity to join the seminar “Let’s talk about sexuality” by the WSCF and EYCE. I went to Budapest with no expectations and a large amount of prejudiced thoughts. I thought we were going to be a very divided group with the “equality heroes” from Scandinavia and the conservative rest. I thought we were going to be the spitting image of the polarized debate in the media.
In fact I experienced one of the most powerful weeks in my life. A diverse mix of people from all over the world. We had discussions and conversations that lasted for hours powered only by curiosity. It also made me ashamed. How had I become the stereotype of what I am scared of myself?

During the week in Budapest I learned what is wrong with the situations I have described earlier in this text. I learned that we meet each other with fear. Fear for something that will ruin our understanding of our world. Fear for something that will challenge the way we judge what is good and bad. Fear is based on insecurity. We battle insecurity by obtaining more knowledge and to gain more knowledge we need to be curious. Curiosity is the essence of what I learned more about in Budapest. I learned that there are so much more about all of the people we meet every day than meets the eye.

I learned that when I meet other LGBTQI-people or when I go to church I should use my curiosity glasses. I should try to experience those I meet as whole human beings with more than just the superficial way of appearance. We are much more than what we show to each other. When I am meeting my queer brothers and sisters and when I meet a brother or sister of faith I should lower my guard and embrace who I am as a person. I should also embrace their diversity and try to learn more about how their lives are and how their way of life could be inspiring to me.

By leading as good examples we could make a difference among our friends and others that we meet. Embrace the curiosity and put away your fears and prejudices. It could make my continuous walk out of the closet more enjoyable. As Albert Einstein once said “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.”. Like Einstein we could also discover amazing aspects of life just by being open minded and interested in the life we live.

— KNUT NATSKÅR SVIHUSS

Studying comparative politics, leading the SCM in Bergen – Norway. Identifies as a Christian, nothing more, nothing less. Uses the SCM’s warm chapel as a brewery.
A lesson from a real life “pastoral encounter”

— CARLA GROSCH-MILLER

The word “encounter” is provocative. It suggests the possibility that we will change each other, that our conversation will be converting.

I want to take note of the opportunities inherent in pastoral encounters that touch on gender and sexuality, and then tell a story. My particular interest in pastoral encounters is in enabling a personal encounter to impact the larger setting in which we operate, perhaps to stimulate other encounters and conversations that move the body of Christ towards greater wholeness.

JULY 13, 2014 ADMIN LEAVE A COMMENT

At the CSCS “Embodied Ministry” conference, the final plenary session dealt with “Gender and Sexuality in the Pastoral Encounter”, in which three panellists each contributed a short personal perspective. Rev Carla Grosch–Miller focused on the words, “pastoral encounter”:
Opportunities in Pastoral Encounters:

- Surface the feelings and truths in the situation
- Affirm a person’s reality and make the space for them to work with it
- Equip and enable the right response for the person and the situation
- Constructively engage all the sources of theology – scripture, tradition, reason, experience
A STORY:

It was the beginning of the second day. I hadn’t slept well. The first day had ended with a strong statement by a participant that sex belonged only in marriage, God-ordained between one man and one woman. No one had risen to articulate a different view. A heavy silence hung over the class as we disbanded.

I had laboured to make the space safe and open. The participants held diverse theological viewpoints; I had hoped that we could teach each other as we explored this sensitive topic. As I tossed and turned that night, I wondered how, in my striving to make the space safe for all, I had empowered primarily those who kept to the party line.

At breakfast “Michael” approached me. “I’m really angry about how the class ended yesterday. I’ve been angry all night. I felt like I was being told that I was not a Christian,” he said. “Can you say more?” I asked. He then told me his story: the story of a young man active in church struggling with his sexuality who, when he had his first sexual experience with another man, was full of self-loathing. Michael became strident in his opposition to homosexuality, until he couldn’t bear the dissonance between what his heart knew and what his tradition taught. He went to his pastor and confessed his struggle. The pastor promptly removed him from all church responsibilities. Michael left and continued to wrestle issues of sex and faith. He came to accept his sexuality and discovered a renewed and deepened faith that in time blossomed into a vocation for ministry. I asked him if he would be willing simply to tell his story at the start of the day’s class. He said “Yes.”
I began the class (after psalm and prayer) with a statement that at the conclusion of class the previous day, we had heard a strong articulation of a scriptural and traditional view of the place of sex in human life and asked if there were any other viewpoints, perhaps drawing on other sources of theology. Michael raised his hand and told his story.

The impact of the story was to transform the space, opening and warming it. Some thanked him for his courage. People who held the heterosexual marriage only viewpoint acknowledged that, while their opinions were strong, there was a need for pastoral sensitivity when dealing with this subject. (Indeed, the two most vocal protagonists of that view approached Michael during the tea break to speak with him.) The remainder of the course was marked by great sensitivity, which enabled others later to speak openly about struggles with internet pornography.

Michael later described the experience of the first day as extremely painful, triggering all the hurtful, destructive, unloving things he had heard as a young man. He knew he either had to live with the anger and survive the rest of the course or say something. He would have wanted to say something judgmental and angry, engaging with the is-
sue theologically, but with my encouragement decided he would just tell his story. He couldn’t have done that on day one because “it would have felt like I was playing the victim, changing the discourse to a different, emotional level which didn’t seem fair”. But that second morning, he felt he could offer it in the structure of a conversation about the sources of theology.

When he opened his mouth to speak to the group, he thought “Oh my God, what am I about to do?” He knew that people would see him in a different light forever after. But once he began, the atmosphere in the room changed. He got visual clues of support around the room: thumbs up, smiles, tears. He immediately felt relief – having said all that was on his heart, not repressing or bottling anger. The man next to him, who was theologically more traditional, put his arm around him when he finished.

“The best thing”, Michael said, “was the spirit of generosity, openness and honesty –real listening to each other– treating each other as sisters and brothers, once we got over the hurdles of fear, doubt and hurt…. ‘Hearing’each other into speech’[1] summed up the whole experience of the course……the Holy Spirit was definitely there.”

2014 JULY 10 14:45

Taken from http://christianityandsexuality.org/?p=1821.
A longer reflection on the pastoral encounter occurs in an article titled ‘Gender and Sexuality in the Pastoral Encounter’ in the journal Theology & Sexuality, Volume 20, number 3 (2014).
What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails and puppy dog tails
that's what little boys are made of!

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and all things nice
that's what little girls are made of!

Gender roles for children under five
Buff men are caricatures of what manhood is. Or so I think whenever I see a bloke wearing a tight, hugging shirt, bearing his ripped arms and bulging pecs.

On the one hand I rate these guys. Committed, they’ve exerted sustained effort to achieve such a physique. And they obviously value their health and wellbeing. But why do they go to such extremes?

Is it to exhibit their virility? Or perhaps they’re insecure?

I think they do it because they’ve lost their minds. Rather, they understand masculinity to be defined by physicality and so they appropriate the image of peak state and bastardise it.

The human form in its peak state has been appreciated over the centuries. Michelangelo’s David demonstrates the worked body is a beautiful object. But confusion of the masculine can be seen in the individuals who sport grossly formed muscles, built by supplements and shakes.

The flawless physique exposes the flaws of the person. An accomplishment of masculinity, absent of what masculinity is. It’s impossible to define masculinity through physicality.
It has been proven there are nine variations of sex and there are strong possibilities there could be more.

The caricatured male is a physical representation of what we think we should be, rather than embracing who and what we are. Within the neoliberal paradigm I suggest the media is a tool used by a hegemony to perpetuate anxiety amongst a globalised populace.

Our psychology is manipulated by marketers who know we (consumers) will feel compelled to copy the behaviour of others. This is why culture is saturated with digitally enhanced images. Anxiety is bred by a sense of deficiency. But to emerge as citizens it is necessary to resist.

Not saying I don’t work out, because I do. And I check myself out in the mirror too. But I understand masculinity is an idea and not a Truth. Masculinity is constructed to define roles for us within society. Masculinity is a label which excuses inequality.

— ROB HOWE

Rob Howe believes the stories we tell hold transformational potential. Recognising climate change as the challenge of our time we are in need of telling a new story to live by.
Is Love Dirty?

— PIERRE THIERRY

And you were excited to try, and I was excited to try, so in this shared joy, we tried. I let you move, taking me slowly in you, and it was all tenderness. And then I started to move, and that was exciting to you, and that was exciting to me.

Our bodies close, speaking in hushed voices, we shared that first experience and it was magnificent and glorious and intimate.

Father, I thank you for telling us that sex has a purpose, that it is very well within your plans for us humans, that we should apply every kind of love and care and attention when we experience it.

Jesus Christ, you became flesh and lived among us. You reminded us that we must apply your commandments in every aspect of our life.

Holy Spirit, please never let anyone convince us that sex is not beautiful and holy. Help us be caring and respectful lovers.

— PIERRE THIERRY

Pierre is a web developer and theology student. He teaches human and programming languages and, in his spare time, writes about ethics and the Bible.
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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE BIBLE:

Exploring Some Amazing Biblical Texts

— DR K. RENATO LINGS

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Christian tradition has condemned intimate same-sex relationships, calling them “sinful”. Theologians have based their negative attitudes on a few Bible verses taken out of context, which has led them to exclude or persecute lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (LGB).

In this article I briefly discuss two types of biblical passages: (1) the condemnatory texts and (2) stories of same-sex love. Both groups are important but also very different. For a number of reasons, they should be approached separately. Each text is unique, and some contain amazing stories.
I. CONDEMNATORY TEXTS

A) THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, a famous passage is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18–19. For more than 2000 years, theologians have discussed it. The original version was written in Hebrew centuries before the Babylonian exile (sixth century B.C.E.). The Old Testament prophets, who lived before, during and after the exile, interpreted the story. Isaiah 1:10 addresses the “rulers of Sodom” and “people of Gomorrah”, saying in 1:17, “Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”. Isaiah clearly associates the names of Sodom and Gomorrah with gross social injustice. For his part, the prophet Ezekiel accuses his native Jerusalem of being “more corrupt than Sodom” and of “committing more sins than Sodom ever did” (16:47–48). According to the Hebrew prophets, the transgressions of Sodom were idolatry and mistreatment of the poor. The book of Exodus (22:21–24; 23:9) explains that the poor included resident aliens. In Genesis 19:9, the mistreated resident alien is Abraham’s nephew Lot. The men of Sodom physically attack his home, forcing him and his family to flee.

When Alexander the Great conquered large territories in the ancient world (third century B.C.E.), the so-called Hellenistic period began. Greek became the dominant lan-
language, and the official Bible of early Christianity was a Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. Very soon different interpretations of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah arose. Some commentators regarded these cities as places of “inhospitality”, and others spoke of “illicit sex”. According to Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (first century C.E.), the sin of Sodom was “pederasty”, i.e. adult men having sex with adolescent boys. The Christian church fathers accepted Philo’s approach. During the Middle Ages, Christianity officially viewed the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as sex between males. In the eleventh century, the Italian monk Peter Damian coined the word “sodomy”. From the thirteenth century, this term also included intimacy between two women. Throughout the Western world, and in the colonies overseas, sodomy became a crime.

In 1869, the word “homosexuality” was coined. Gradually it replaced sodomy. However, only in the late twentieth century have many countries decriminalized same-sex intimacy while other countries refuse to do so. For most scholars today, the story of Sodom says nothing about loving same-sex relationships. Some argue that what happens in Genesis 19:5, where the men of Sodom want to “know” the two visitors, is equal to “attempted gang rape”. Others, however, suggest that the Sodomites are violating the sacred laws of hospitality. A third group proposes to read the story in accordance with the Hebrew prophets, who vigorously protested against social injustice committed against the poor and vulnerable, including resident aliens.

The other famous condemnatory text in the Old Testament is Leviticus 18:22 (amplified in 20:13 to include the death penalty). Many Bible versions present this very short verse as “With a man you shall not lie as with a woman”. However, this is a poor translation. The original does not have the words “man” and “as with”. The Hebrew text literally says, “With a male you shall not lie down the lyings-down of a woman”. Note that the Hebrew word ishshah, “woman”, sometimes means “wife”. In current academic literature, at least sixteen different interpretations of this obscure verse exist. They range all the way from “homosexuality” and “male homosexuality” to “anal penetration” and “gender confusion”. In recent years, several scholars have suggested that Lev 18:22 may be addressing the issue of “incest between males” or perhaps “incest with your father’s wife”. A lot more research is needed to clarify the meaning of this verse within its context.

**B) THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In the New Testament, a few hotly debated texts are found in the letters of the apostle Paul. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 6:9–10. Here the apostle lists a number of vices, including the obscure Greek term arsenokoitai. A literal translation would be “male-liers”, “male-beds”, or “bed-males”. Some Bible versions offer the mistranslation “homosexuals”. This is patently wrong because “homosexual” and “heterosexual” are modern words unmatched in ancient languages. In addition, “homosexuals” includes women, and arsenokoitai refers to a group of male persons. In today’s Western societies, the law establishes equality between consenting adults. In antiquity, all relationships took place within a strict social hierarchy. In short, no one knows exactly who the arsenokoitai were. Among biblical scholars, there is considerable debate. Therefore, Bible translators should handle this text with care and avoid jumping to conclusions.

In Paul’s day, the city of Rome had more than 400 temples dedicated to various deities. The Christian community there included two groups of converts. Some had a Jewish background and others were “gentiles”, i.e. people raised within pagan religions. A particular passage in Romans 1 is central to the homosexuality/Bible debate (see below). From verse 18, the apostle paints an unflattering picture of idolatrous people who lived in the past, long before Paul was born. In 1:26 the text speaks of “their” women, i.e. females who
belonged to the idolatrous men. These women committed acts “against nature”. According to early Christian interpreters, this meant that they were letting the men penetrate them anally. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, having sex “against nature” meant “not using the woman’s vagina”. The men in 1:27 clearly participated in sexual orgies with other males, possibly associated with the temples of Bacchus (god of wine) or the goddess Cybele. These people are described as “evil, boastful, and heartless” (1:28–32). Clearly the main issue in this chapter is idolatry. At no point does Paul refer to relationships among Christians. He wrote this letter to resolve conflicts within the newly founded Christian community in Rome (cf. chapters 2, 8, 11, and 14 – 16).

**B. SAME-SEX LOVE**

The Bible contains several stories of same-sex relationships. They may or may not have had a sexual component. Although they have always been part of the biblical canon, for a long time theologians have been loath to engage with these texts in any meaningful way. In recent decades, a growing number of scholars have pointed out that the biblical narrators present such relationships as legitimate and respectable. Two stories are included in the Old Testament and two are in the New Testament.

The book of Ruth describes two widows who, against all odds, stick together for life. Naomi, an Israelite from Bethlehem, spends years living in the neighbouring country of Moab. Following the death of her husband and two sons, she returns to her native Bethlehem. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, decides to go with her, leaving everything behind. The narrator explains that Ruth clung to Naomi, using the same verb davaq from Genesis 2:24, where “a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife”. In other words, Ruth commits herself for life. This also becomes clear from her statement in Ruth 1:16: “Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God”. Naomi accepts this extraordinary offer and the two women travel to Bethlehem. The community receives the couple very well. The local women celebrate Ruth’s relationship with Naomi, speaking to the latter about “your daughter-in-law, who loves you”, and “she is more to you than seven sons” (4:15). Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David (4:22).

The books of Samuel contain the story of two young men named David and Jonathan. The latter is the grown-up son of King Saul, while David is a young shepherd boy. Soon after they meet (1 Sam 18), Jonathan falls in love with David and forms a lifelong bond with him. Initially Saul loves David, but his feelings change later. As David becomes immensely successful, Saul becomes jealous and bitter. He regards David as a dangerous rival and tries to kill him on several occasions. Jonathan, however, remains faithful to David. Whenever he and David meet to renew their commitment to each other, they invoke the name of yhwh, God of Israel (20:42). Following Jonathan’s death on the battlefield, David composes an elegy, saying (2 Sam 1:26), “My brother Jonathan, very pleasant were you to me. Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women”.

A particular story in the New Testament occurs in two versions. One is in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 8) and the other in Luke (Lk 7). A military officer, possibly a Roman centurion, approaches Jesus requesting healing for his dear slave boy. The situation is unusual for several reasons. In ancient Palestine there was an abundance of slaves, which made them expendable. Many masters treated their slaves with contempt and brutality. Furthermore, it was extraordinary for a Roman in a position of power to approach a poor, nomadic Jewish preacher (Jesus) for help. Therefore, the centurion must have had a special motivation for humbling himself before Jesus. Apparently no local physician had been able to heal the young man. The fact that he went out of his way to save the life of this slave shows that the officer was very
fond of him. As it alternates between the Greek words for “slave” and “boy”, the original text discreetly indicates that the two men may have had an intimate sexual relationship where “boy” refers to the younger part. This was socially acceptable in the Greco-Roman world. Significantly, Jesus granted the officer’s request and highly commended him for his faith.

Who is the beloved disciple? In most circles, the answer tends to be “John, of course”. For centuries, church tradition has taught this. However, the gospel text itself suggests another name. In John 11:3, the two sisters Martha and Mary send a message to Jesus asking him to come to their home at once because “the one you love is ill”. This is a reference to their brother Lazarus, who dies shortly afterwards. When Jesus finally arrives and weeps outside Lazarus’ tomb (11:35), those present exclaim, “See how he loved him”. Following his miraculous resurrection, in 12:2 Lazarus is at the dinner table with Jesus and his disciples. In 13:23 the text mentions “the one whom Jesus loved” reclining at the table next to Jesus. At this point, the name of Lazarus disappears from view, but instead an unnamed beloved disciple is present on a number of crucial occasions, including the final chapters 19, 20, and 21. Although the gospel writer does not clarify this point, it would seem that Lazarus and the beloved disciple could well be the same person. At any rate, the original Greek text highlights the tenderness, intimacy and strong bond between Jesus and this disciple (13:23; 19:27).
CONCLUSION

In summary, the common assumption that the Bible opposes the modern concept of homosexuality is unfounded. Until very recently, Christian theologians have provided poor interpretations of the texts, ignoring the social context of the writers and the implications of the original words used, bending them to fit their own prejudices. The brutal use of these texts has caused immense suffering to LGBT persons. In a number of countries around the world, lesbian, gay and bisexual believers still face discrimination, harassment and persecution allegedly in the name of the Bible. The time has come for the churches to let go of their obsession with sexual issues. The condemnatory passages are irrelevant to the lives of LGBT people. Other stories describing same-sex love are far more significant. They should be in focus whenever the issue of same-sex relationships in the Bible is debated.

Last, but not least, the Christian gospel is for all believers (John 3:16): “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”.

— K. RENATO LINGS

K. Renato Lings holds advanced degrees in Spanish, Translation, and Theology. He has studied Latin, Greek and Hebrew and published books in Spanish (2011) and English (2013) on sexuality and biblical interpretation.
Texts of Oppression or Liberation?
How interpreting the Bible can help or harm Women.

— Hadje Sadje

INTRODUCTION

Modern scholars have questioned the role of women in the production of biblical interpretation, saying they have been neglected and silenced. Critics argue that most biblical interpreters have given greater emphasis to masculine images and metaphors of God. Women as a group have been subordinated within the traditional Christian community; we have often a tendency to associate women exclusively with tragic stories of terror in Scripture. We cited these biblical stories of terror as against women. However, scholars argue that utilising feminine imagery of God and retelling texts of terror from the Christian Scripture challenges the creeping normality of oppressive social structures that abuse and oppress women in our society.

These assumptions have brought me two following proposals. Firstly, we should utilize and raise awareness around the feminine images of God in the Bible. Secondly, we should value the transformative power of storytelling using biblical stories of terror as a ‘consciousness-raising’ tools for abused women; this can lead and empower contemporary women to speak out, stand up, and bravely face their own oppressors.
A. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF BIBLICAL FEMININE IMAGES OF GOD

The most visible and obvious form of violence is physical, also known as direct violence. However, experts suggest that it can take in the subtle or invisible forms such as structural and cultural violence. According to the founder of Peace and Conflict studies Johan Galtung, structural violence refers to a social class, gender or nationality that have more access to goods, resources, and opportunities compared with other social class, gender and nationalities; cultural violence pertains to dominant beliefs and attitudes. Although social scientists put emphasis on structural violence as the root of all evils, cultural violence has played a major role in cementing, recreating and reproducing social inequality. It appears that religious metaphors and symbols fall into the category of cultural violence. Religious metaphors and symbols about women are embedded in unquestioned worldviews, norms, habits, and symbols that cement social hierarchy between sexes. There are progressive Christians who attempt to offer resistance and alternative perspectives. Since religion and gender inequality are contentious issues, these topics result in a variety of reactions and responses among Christian communities.

As already pointed out, widespread and systematic injustices against women are supported by the patriarchal interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Using religious metaphors, symbols, and analogies that possess patriarchal biases evokes distorted interpretations of the Gospel message. The Christian church’s main justification of the concept of patriarchal bias are based on the following biblical verses: Genesis 2: 22, I Corinthians 14: 34-35, I Timothy 2: 12, Colossian 3: 18, and Ephesians 5: 22-24. These verses have been used historically to subject women. In this distorted interpretation, patriarchal culture sets the agenda for the church. This patriarchal interpretation has become an ide-
ological bulwark of domestic violence against women. The problem lies at the root of conceiving women’s suffering as part of God’s divine plan. This universal instruction has spawned major criticisms from critical feminist scholars. For example, Catholic nun Christine Gudorf describes in her book entitled, Comparative Religious Ethics:

“In patriarchal religions, women have not played leadership roles. They have had little if any voice in creating, selecting or interpreting the canon of sacred texts and little role in creating the theology or doctrine of officiating in rituals of religions.”

As such, Christianity became a patriarchal religion and the Scripture became the source of such teaching to subordinate the position of women. Despite criticisms, the Church still uses these religious images, metaphors, and analogies as tools to subordinate position of women in the church leadership. For example, biblical metaphors such as father, king, lord, judge, warrior and shepherd possess some patriarchal biases that evoke masculine images for God. However, these biblical metaphors do not imply the superiority of men over women in the sight of God. As misogynistic ideas strive until today, we should assert that Christian Scripture is a legitimate source of inspiration, transformation, and, potentially, liberation for both men and women.

Today, Christian feminists contend that we need to give emphasis and appreciation of feminine images of God. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) gives us numerous references to God as a woman. For example, a woman in labor, a gentle nursing mother, a female eagle, and so forth (Isaiah
These biblical images were also used by the New Testament writers. For example, the writer of Matthew utilized the imagery of mother hen longing for her chicks (see Matthew 11:19; 23: 27; Luke 13:34). This verse reimagines God’s image in the new context of society. However, both the imagery of the mother and the father is both used to address God in the Ancient Near East. According to Sarah J. Dille, “In the ancient Near East, gods and goddesses were said to be like both father and mother to the worshiper”.

Furthermore, the writer of Matthew re-appropriating and reinforcing the old concept of God as a mother hen that provides a protection of the Israelites (Ps 17.8; 36.7). This imagery of mother hen challenges the patriarchal hegemonic discourse. It subverts the notion that women are weak and powerless. Utilizing and retrieving the imagery of mother God become a counterdiscursive view of womankind. Needless to say, we should use these feminine images to challenge the notion that God favors men. The crucial thing to see these metaphors as challenging the dominant metaphors in an ancient patriarchal society. For patriarchal society, these would be ‘violation metaphors’ or offensive metaphors, but these metaphors could lead to women’s liberation in male-dominated society. The biblical feminine images of God advocate an alternative perspective of reality, which allow us to see new things and take new courses of action.

B. THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF STORYTELLING USING BIBLICAL STORIES OF TERROR

Phyllis Trible is a leading expert on feminist interpretation of biblical stories of terror. The Hebrew Scripture, as Trible claims, has four problematic texts, which Trible calls “texts of terror.” In her book, Texts of Terror, she proposes to examine those four biblical stories poetically and theologically. Trible has taken some essential steps toward addressing these biblical texts of terror. The four problematic stories are: the story of Hagar the slave, Gen. 16: 1-16, 21: 9-21; the rape of Tamar, 2 Sam. 13: 1-22; an unnamed concubine, Judg. 19:1-30; and the daughter of Jephthah offered as a human sacrifice, Judg. 11: 29-40. Trible argues that ‘texts of terror’ describes women as troublesome, weak, abused, exploited, raped, a commodity, and inferior to men.

For example, the story of Hagar the slave. Trible wrestled with this tragic story. In Genesis 21: 9-21, Abraham forced his wife-slave (euphemistically called “concubine” in most English translations) Hagar and their son Ishmael into the Desert of Beersheba without being concerned for their safety and security. The story has been largely undefined and subject to various conflicting interpretations. However, this story is a domestic violence against women. Obviously, Hagar suffers from physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual violence. Feminist scholars argue that retelling these four stories will put these abuses into a space for open debates and rethinking of our religious practices. Retelling texts of terror will inspire and support abused women to speak out about their own experiences and seek help to fight against any form of oppression. To avoid discussing and confronting these four texts of terror would create a range of obstacles to women liberation.

Moreover, the story of Hagar is a story of abused woman that names the unnamed evil of our oppressive society today. It is a story that would provide a ‘consciousness-raising’ (conscientisation) tools for abused women to empower them. As a culture of silence creates countless discrete acts of violence against women, and legitimised patriarchal society in itself creates an oppressive culture. Trible contends that we should identify their suffering as our suffering today by retelling and rereading these stories. As abused women are silent because of a culture of shame, rereading these four stories would allow them to talk about their abuse experi-
ences. Why? Such biblical narratives recount the constant struggle of women in the contemporary society. In short, the story of Hagar named the unnamed evil of our times. The writer tries to identify the unnamed evil that oppressed and marginalized women in the Ancient patriarchal society. For Trible, Hagar’s suffering is a recounting of marginalized and oppressed people in patriarchal society. It is a powerful story that empowers the powerless and giving voices to voiceless. To sum up the above: engaging with these ‘texts of terror’ from different angles hopefully unfolds the qualities of a woman that liberates her from the male-dominated society. To identify oneself in the texts of terror as a victim of oppression, like Hagar, is an absolutely essential step in the ‘consciousness-raising’ (conscientisation) of any of abused women. Trible’s unconventional approach will help us to see the multiplicity of meanings and views in the
story of Hagar, and its unique understanding of the biblical stories that empower women. The incorporation of storytelling techniques into bible study method will served as mechanism for ‘consciousness-raising’ (conscientisation) or educating and empowering and for creating a broad-based social concern with women’s issues.

A particularly important recent study highlights the urgency of encourage abused women to speak out against physical and sexual violence. According to UN Women 2016 Report:

**It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.**

How do abused women cope with psychological, psychical, emotional, and sexual violence? The answer is and epidemic of silence. An epidemic of silence is a culture in which the majority of people are submissive to the patriarchal social order that maintains women’s silence as a natural and given reality. It is interesting to observe that in the patriarchal society, the abused women are considered ‘mute’ and prohibited to think critically and consciously analyse their own situation and society as well. Contemporary studies show that abused women choose to keep silent due to a culture of shame. Most abused women believed that being abused is normal. Some are afraid of danger and threatened by a perpetrator. Others feel disgraced within their own community and speaking out would bring shame to their family. As a result, abused women prefer to keep silent. We all know that it may be very hard for victims to talk about their abuse.
experience, however, victims should challenge and confront these psychical, emotional, and sexual abuses. In recent studies, incorporation of storytelling techniques have been used successfully in different disciplines such as psychology, literary studies, religious studies, and biblical studies.

As abused women retell and identify their own experiences of helplessness and victimization onto the texts of terror, this can create a ‘consciousness-raising’. Incorporating the storytelling techniques into the biblical study method as a ‘consciousness-raising’ tool for abused women would empower them to speak out, stand up, and face bravely against their abuser. In order to ensure this, Trible suggests that in retelling stories of terror to abused women, the silent treatment is not an option. Because of this, using these stories of terror would provide an open space to discuss their abusive experiences in the public sphere. By doing this, it is naming the unnamed evil against the culture of silence and shame.

— HADJE CRESENCIO SADJE

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Understanding the Mystery of Clergy Sexual Abuse

reprinted from Mozaik 26.

— MARTIN WEBER, D.MIN.

(From the October 2008 Edition of Hopespeak)

At the Stop Being Silent! seminar in Minsk, in an interactive session on ‘Redefining Domestic Violence: Sexual Exploitation and the Church’, Dr. Valli Batchelor lectured about violence against women by clerical abusers.

This excerpt provides an overview of clergy sexual exploitation and the Hope of Survivors network, following from the previous article on what happened when one woman tried to speak out in Australia. This excerpt has been reprinted and adapted with permission from the Hope of Survivors website (www.thehopeofsurvivors.com), a resource and support organisation for victims of clergy sexual exploitation. Because the majority of clergy sexual abuse is male clerical abuse of female parishioners, this article only addresses this majority.
THE HOPE OF SURVIVORS

Shame is the reason I’m so proud to be connected with The Hope of Survivors. Perhaps I should explain. More than any organisation I’ve known in several decades of pastoral ministry, including law enforcement chaplaincy, the Hope of Survivors (thos) helps victims feeling ashamed from sexual abuse find dignity, confidence, hope, and even joy. And so I’m proud to serve on the executive board of thos.

Shame afflicts most of us to some degree. It’s part of the human condition. As a chubby child, I was ashamed of my weight. Parents might be ashamed of their teenagers’ bad choices. Reformed ‘party animals’ may feel shame for years of carousing. But the human spirit knows no shame to match that of a sexual abuse victim who has been manipulated into feeling guilty for her predator’s sins. And those among them most deeply sunken in shame may be victims of clergy sexual abuse.

Reasonable people are outraged at a sexual predator who drags a jogger off the trail into the bushes. Society springs to the defence of such victims. As for incest, everyone except enabling relatives is furious about paternal predators. But when it comes to clergy sexual abuse, congregational sympathy usually gravitates to a popular, powerful preacher. Ironically, victims of clergy sexual abuse often must go outside the church to find a sympathetic heart. Tragically, they may lose not only their trusted spiritual leader but also most, if not all, of their faith community – even close friends.

This is where thos has been such a lifesaver for hundreds of lonely victims of clergy sexual abuse who suffer in solitary shame. thos helps them realise that:

- As with all professionals, a pastor is responsible for not abusing his trust by allowing – and often planning – the sexualisation of what began as normal interaction between himself and a vulnerable parishioner.
- Sexual abuse is not necessarily scary or painful; often unsuspecting victims are drawn into a close friendship with a pastor that unexpectedly becomes romanticised and then sexualised.
- Clergy romance or sex with a parishioner is not an ‘affair’, because it arises from a power imbalance. Physicians, educators, and workplace supervisors understand this. Somehow it seems harder for many churches to accept this, perhaps because of the hero status of a star pastor.
- Most pastors are men of integrity who never would abuse a member. To preserve this propriety, clergy need education and sometimes counselling to manage their own emotions and attractions as they interact with the vulnerable members of their flock.
- Victims of clergy sexual abuse need and deserve advocates in the church to guide them through a resolution process that emphasises healing rather than vindictiveness.
Those who survive clergy sexual abuse need not bear the burden of proving to anyone – not even themselves or God – that they are perfect and completely innocent about what happened to them. The Bible says all of us are sinners in need of the grace and forgiveness of God.

It is possible to forgive one’s abuser while also establishing boundaries of protection against further abuse by anyone inside or outside the body of Christ.

Women who have suffered clergy sexual abuse need to find their primary identity in being God’s beloved children; this is more than having merely survived something evil done to them.

**CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

To summarise the tragedy of clergy sexual abuse:

- It is normal for Christian men and women faithful to their spouses to feel attracted to other people. Unmet emotional needs tend to multiply this chemistry.

- When a pastor finds himself attracted to a parishioner, it is his or her responsibility as a professional caregiver to recognise the danger and use the responsibility of leadership to prevent the relationship from becoming romanticised.
• Some predatory pastors are so corrupt as to be strategically and compulsively abusive, but many fine pastors become sexually abusive simply because they allow their love for God and their spouses to become less important than their ministry to church members.

• Paradoxically, victims of abuse often take much or most of the blame and shame upon themselves after being drawn into inappropriate sexuality.

• The more likeable and admirable a pastor is, the more a victim of his sexual abuse may suffer shame and guilt. This also is true at the opposite extreme; the more deceptive and manipulative a career predator is, the more likely his victim may suffer increased shame and guilt – the most clever abusers manage to download all blame to the victim.

• Church leaders and other members typically rally around a popular pastor, despite credible evidence that he is guilty of sexual abuse. Often the church would rather blame his victim than lose a beloved spiritual leader.

• In the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse, most efforts to aid recovery are devoted toward the abuser and his spouse rather than to the victim, who often is abandoned or even expelled from the community of believers. In such cases, the Hope of Survivors often becomes the only hope of surviving clergy sexual abuse.

SUGGESTED READING:
As recommended by Valli Batchelor and Amanda Gearing


M Porter, Sex, Power and the Clergy South, Yarra, Australia, Hardie Grant Books, 2003.

In May, I attended the study session “Let’s talk about Sexuality” in Budapest, jointly organised by EYCE and WSCF-E. During one of the guest talks, a gender activist from Budapest mentioned that transgender people have to undergo a series of mental health assessment in order to have gender reassignment surgery, and the procedure can be very humiliating. He thought that this should be abolished. The humiliating assessment is probably a common obstacle faced by most of transgender people all over the world. My question to that activist was: Are the surgeries in Budapest funded by the government?

“Only 10% of the surgery fee”, he said. No wonder he suggested it’d be better if transgender people can get rid of the medical assessment procedure. However, in some regions, take Hong Kong as an example, gender reassignment surgery can be mostly funded by the government if it is proved to be “medically necessitated”. To obtain this proof, one has
to be diagnosed with “Gender Identity Disorder” (GID) by a mental health specialist. In other words, people who need financial support from the government or their insurance company have to be diagnosed with GID. This medical term suggests that transgender is a disorder, a sickness, something wrong or abnormal. In short, it pathologises and stigmatises transgenderism.

Not only the name of the diagnosis—Gender Identity Disorder—is pathologising being transgendered, but also the fact that the diagnosis assumes that people who feel uncomfortable to follow the norm of their assigned gender are suffering from certain disorder or disease. This diagnosis does not question whether there is a problem with the gender norms.

In light of the above, the dilemma is: on the one hand, diagnosis serves as an instrument (“medically necessitated”) for transgendered people to receive funding from the government or insurance companies. On the other hand, it leads to the problem of treating transgenderism as a disease, and it stigmatizes. Personally, I tend to agree that keeping such diagnosis is necessary under the current social context because it helps to obtain funding for gender reassignment surgeries, which in turn enables transgendered people to achieve greater autonomy. They feel it is unbearable to live their life with the gender they were assigned at birth. Also, when medical treatment such as hormone prescription or gender reassignment surgery is involved, it is quite impossible to totally exclude this matter from of the medical realm.

Some compare gender reassignment procedures with plastic surgeries, and proclaim that these shouldn’t be funded by public funds if that’s not “medically necessitated”, just as plastic surgeries are not funded in that case either. Let's not to argue whether such comparison is appropriate first; such a viewpoint suggests that society’s stakeholders worry that if medical proof is not needed at all, resources will be abused for fulfilling people’s “own interest” instead of something vitally important.

Based on the presumption that government resources are limited and should therefore be used effectively, the current mental health assessment for transgender works as a filter, to distinguish which people have the greatest need for the resources. Even though I doubt the practice of giving psychiatrists the power of diagnosis, I still tend to believe that certain assessment should be carried out in order to monitor whether resources are being used wisely.

Therefore, one thing needed to be figured out: if psychiatrists shouldn’t be the ones to give a diagnosis or assessment, then who should?
Jacob Hale pointed out that “this matter should not be mediated by psychologists and psychiatrists; the question of whether and how to gain access to medical and technological resources should be a matter between client and medical doctor exclusively.”(pp83) Commenting on this viewpoint, in “Undoing Gender”, Judith Butler assesses that this suggestion “treats the patient as a client who is exercising consumer autonomy within the medical domain”, but it is also important “to ask whether the inclinations of medical practitioners are generally to be trusted with this responsibility”.

Though there’s no sociologically grounded answer to this question, Hale’s view suggests that it is not the problem of “medicalisation”, but the problem of exercising power over people’s autonomy in the name of mental health, and the negative effect of pathologising transgenderism.

Therefore, when it comes to assessment, it is important to prevent it from instilling a diagnosis of mental disorder onto the clients. Not conforming to the gender norm should not be deemed as a disorder, nor should we conceive of being transgendered as a mental illness. As sex and gender are to a very large extent socially constructed, any gender related discomfort should not merely be regarded as an individual’s internal problem, especially when the rigid gender norms is probably the source of discomfort. Failing to “feel appropriate” with one’s assigned gender is just something not typical, but not “abnormal”.

When such “gender atypical traits” (pp82), a term suggested by Dr. Richard Isay, occur and greatly obstructs one’s ability to have a normal social life, one should be given the right to access a funded surgery.

Last but not least, most diagnoses of someone as transgender require that the patients show that they can live a desirable life with the gender they want to “become” over a period of time in order to undertake gender reassignment surgery. Even though I uphold the idea that “gender is fluid”, an assessment that acknowledges someone’s gender by deciding whether it meets the test of time is undeniably politically incorrect, but based on the social context that there’s limited public resources such criteria seems to be a necessary evil.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Throughout the writing process of this article, I have been doubting whether it is ethical for me to comment when people should be given the rights to obtain helps to undertake transgender/transsexual treatments. The condition of transgenderism and the urge for treatment is something that I have never experienced, and I can hardly imagine that very feeling. Knowing the treatment can be a matter of life and death to some people, but also the sad fact that individuals conditions can only be represented by authorities, and only through such social means can we exercise personal rights, I hope what I suggested is a lesser evil and practical way to achieve the balance between these two sides. I would like to quote one sentence written by Judith Butler to conclude this situation, “until those social conditions are radically changed, freedom will require unfreedom, and autonomy is implicated in subjection.”


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**HOI TUNG NG**

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La Sexualité

— MELISSA

He called it “LA SEXUALATIE” —
Personally belonging to
no one individually.
Said it was not a
personality disorder like
Quick 999,
what should I do with my
Delinquent daughter?
I think she kissed someone
Who has a vagina!
Not a condition you should have
interventions to explain...
Err no mum no, I'm not taking herion ...
But oh yeah and don't go mad I'm
A fully blown lesbian...
Ps. can you let dad know.
The last time I cracked at his
Downton abbey commentary
And screamed
If they were “homo” I was
Obligatory “homo” too,
he said yes my dear child
we are all homo-sapien...
what on earth are they teaching you
Children today?
But now when she asks what
Exactly this means
You know she's referring to your
(Not-so-clear-cut)
sexual activities.
You can see the sweat on her moustache
As she contemplates if they will
Ever be grandparents. ....
Your red in the face starts to
spill on the pavements.
You wonder why it feels like your fighting
some political movement.
But he said to me no,
don't you dare worry little bumblebee ..
This is all just a part of
LA SEXUALATIE,
Never let their skeletal flaws
make you take it so personally.
Hermaphrodite:

— MELISSA

I wake to find muses are dead,
And my name is that of the hermaphrodite —
A metaphor now for both
Genital mutilation
And a throbbing penis.
Because where one hand
Covers
My breasts,
The other pushes
His hand
Under my skirt,
Like a paint with too much water
Where the colours have been
Forced to blur.
Because bigots breed in between
The spaces of your
Knicker draw, and the dust of
Greek mythology....
Typography will not pluck
The perceptions of our
Immorality,
It will only mask what you
Perceive as dirty.
Therefore treason is not
A woman who kisses the lips of
Another woman,
An infertile womb or a man who
Stuffs his bra with red lipstick.
It is not the art of
Being promiscuous, the people who
Claim to be feminist, or the sexual act
Between two men.
Our sheets have been made
From second-hand
newspaper foldings,
Daily Mail discrimination
etched onto their skin
In the shape of a foetus
Like facts, rather than opinions.
But now all muses are dead,
And we must wear the labels of
hermaphrodites
With pride.
Perceive as dirty. Therefore treason is not a woman who kisses the lips of another woman, an infertile womb or a man who stuffs his bra with red lipstick. It is not the art of being promiscuous, the people who claim to be feminist, or the sexual act between two men. Our sheets have been made from second-hand newspaper foldings, Daily Mail discrimination etched onto their skin in the shape of a foetus like facts, rather than opinions. But now all muses are dead, and we must wear the labels of hermaphrodites with pride.

— MELISSA

Melissa recently relocated to Canada and is currently working on a collection of short stories. Her love of poetry started at a young age and she has been writing ever since.