

Sibyls' Service

25th May 2025

Mary Ward

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Opening Prayer

The earth is God's and all that is in it.

Who shall stand in the high places of God?

Those with clean hands and pure hearts

Those do not lift their soul to what is false

Or speak with deceit.

It is they who will receive blessing and vindication from God,

Come God and be with us today. Our hearts and minds are open.

(based on Psalm 24)

Gloria

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Gloria

Vivaldi Gloria

Confession

Loving God, Creator of the Universe, you know our inner hearts.

Too often we have failed to follow your ways, to love our neighbour and to truly love you.

Forgive us for our past failures.

Grant us fresh hearts and new minds so that we can celebrate the full richness and diversity of human experience in the Love of Christ.

The Lamb of God

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’

He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”’, as the prophet Isaiah said.

This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’

(John 1:19–20,29)

Song

Behold the Lamb, by Stuart Townend

Isaiah 53:4–5

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.

Based on Psalm 136

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good.

The Love of God endures forever

Who alone does great wonders.

The Love of God endures forever

Who made the heavens skillfully.

The Love of God endures forever

Who spread the land on the waters.

The Love of God endures forever

Who made the great lights:

The Love of God endures forever

the sun to rule by day,

The Love of God endures forever

the moon and stars to rule by night.

The Love of God endures forever

Who gives food to every creature and comes to us in bread and wine.

The Love of God endures forever

Communion

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:23–26)

Communion

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor 10:16–17)

The Spiritual Abuse of Queer People

In her article “The Spiritual Abuse of Queer People” Celeste Irwin writes about her experience of a toxic, abusive church. She says:

When I came out as a transgender lesbian woman, almost two years after I left that church, I lost nearly all of my remaining friends.... The abuse I have taken by Christians for being transgender is so much worse than any I ever took before.

One passage particularly struck me:

While the passages used against queer people at least leave some room for debate, there simply is no biblical basis for standing against transgender people.

Why is that? Why is there such virulent transphobia in so many churches, when the biblical basis for opposing transition is so weak, if not non-existent?

A House Built on Sand

The problem is that there is a whole house of abusive teaching and structure which is built in layers, where each layer provides essential support to the layer above. The bottom layer is transphobia. But transphobia has no foundation in the Bible: the house is built on sand.

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Homophobia

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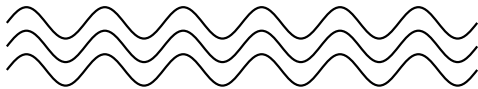
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My wife and I have been happily married for 37 years. After 34 years of supposedly heterosexual marriage I discovered my gender identity and started to transition (with my wife’s support). So, it turns out that I am a lesbian and my wife and I are gay married.

Homophobia → Male Headship

If the church decides it cannot continue to oppose gay marriage, but still holds to a complementarian “headship” model for marriage...who is the “head” in a lesbian or gay marriage?

In Chapter 16 of *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis wrote: “in a council of two there can be no majority” He assumed that because a marriage cannot be a democracy, one or other party must have “the power of deciding the family policy”.

In a heterosexual marriage, this is the husband, of course(!) (according to the complementarians)

But in a gay or lesbian marriage, which partner has this deciding vote?

Lewis did not seem to be aware of, or perhaps did not take into account, the concept of *consensus decision making*, which is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement in a group.

Consensus Decision Making

Instead of simply voting for an item and having the majority getting their way, a consensus group is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports — or at least can live with.

Consensus is about co-operation between equals.

Consensus enables a group to share power — everyone who is fundamentally affected by a decision can work together to find solutions that meet everyone's needs.

If the group has the same basic values and goals then, at least in theory, it should always be possible to find a course of action which aligns with these values and achieves these goals.

This is how egalitarian marriage works, and it works just as well for gay and lesbian marriage as for heterosexual marriage.

Male Headship → Patriarchy

But if the church now accepts that men are not, in fact, inherently superior and destined to lead in marriage, and that a hierarchical arrangement in marriage is not inevitable, then why continue to oppose women's ministry in church?

Perhaps egalitarian ideas can be extended beyond the home to leadership in the church?

Patriarchy → Hierarchy

Even further: if consensus decision making works in the home, why not also in the church? If the home does not need a “head” to make all the important decisions and take all the deciding votes, then why does a church need a head minister or chief pastor who makes all the important decisions?

Why not use the consensus model in the church?

If there is no “natural” authority of husbands over wives, is there really a “natural” authority of leaders over their congregations?

A House Built on Sand

Now we see why some churches and Christian groups are so virulently opposed to the very existence of transgender, non-binary, intersex or gender-variant people in general.

Their house is built on sand with no solid foundations.

We also see why Christian Nationalists are so keen to see transphobic legislation introduced everywhere. The aim is to eliminate transgender people from public life. Michael Knowles at CPAC in 2023 said “transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely ...at every level.”

The aim is to build this same house in public life: step by step to eliminate transgender people, eliminate gay people, enforce patriarchy and racism into law, and create a hierarchy which will and give them total power over the lives of everyone else.

A House Built on Sand



As the streams of living water, flowing from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1) begin to beat against that house, those who live there are terrified that their foundations will crumble, and that one by one, the layers of false doctrine that support and maintain their power will be stripped away.

The foundation of transphobia must be upheld because the very existence of transgender people is a threat to their project.

Blessing

May God help you become exactly who you are. May the Divine bless and keep you safe; may God's light shine upon you with grace; may you perceive the Holiness in the faces of others and in the world, lifting you up, cherishing you, making you whole. May we be strong, strong, and strengthen one another.