



## LGBTQ+ — ?

81 years ago when I entered school, the world was plainly divided. There were girls and there were boys. The girls wore skirts and the boys wore long



trousers. Later when I attended an all boys boarding school, it was pretty boring. I came to the conclusion that girls added a certain zest to life. Simple. Or is it? Now that I have stumbled along in life for quite a few years, I recognize that the whole situation concerning how a person identifies as a human being is much more complicated.

We learn from the people who mean the most to us. I had not given a lot of thought to anything except the straight world until I had really important and dear friends who were gay or lesbian and who were made

to suffer under the draconian rules existing a number of years ago.

Then when I was spending a little time studying spirituality among indigenous people in the Southwest, I was surprised to find that some clans had a large spectrum of alternatives when it came to gender identification. What we termed “gay”, for example, would sometimes be considered “prophetic” — providing a wisdom that went beyond the practicalities of everyday life.

I thought my understanding of gender was keeping pace with what was happening in the world until “trans” came along, with all of its multiple connotations. The academic meaning is *a person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person’s biological sex assigned at birth* — but it is more complex than that.



I met my first trans friend many years ago. A university made him retake all of his college courses to get a degree because he had changed his name from his original feminine name to a masculine name. As the years rolled on, I came in contact with other young people who were under the trans umbrella. By coincidence my experience has all been with people moving from female to male.

Pronouns got confusing for my aging brain — “him”, “her”, “them”. But I observed that life became very difficult for some of them when daddy's Little Princess tried to announce that he wanted to be daddy's son. Variations on *Never darken my doorstep*



*again* became common. I must confess that even I get a bit confused when someone I knew as a woman shows up a year or so later as a male. But that's my problem, not his.



In 2016 the U.S. military, after an extensive study, lifted its ban on transgender people serving openly in the military. Of course there had always been transgender service members who hid their gender identity. With this decision the United States joined a number of other nations, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Israel, who allowed transgender troops to serve openly. But in one of his early morning tweets, our Tweeter-in-Chief announced that, *the United States government will not accept or allow trans-gender individuals to serve in any capacity*. This tweet was widely condemned by more than 56 retired generals and admirals as well as prominent members of Congress on both sides of the aisle. But it was allowed to stand, although it is under attack in the courts. Apparently transgender people are not included in Number 45's concept of what will make America great again.



There is a curious passage in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas that indicates this may be an old question. Mary Magdalene was meeting with Jesus and his chief disciples. Simon Peter asked Jesus to make Mary leave. Peter was known for being critical of women in the community that was forming around Jesus. Their culture did not give women public roles. However Jesus responded, *Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males* — a friend says a more accurate translation would be, *Get over it Peter!*

OK, I may be stretching a biblical point here, but it does seem like the Gospel is attempting to establish a sense of the equality that goes beyond gender issues and stands in sharp contrast to any mean-spirited bashing from a politician or religious authority.



There is a spiritual bridge that connects gender identification and the community, family or spiritual circle, in which person exists. A story I heard recently is worth repeating.

Ann (I'm using alternative names here) was a 10-year-old girl who had been very depressed of late. Then, she/he announced that she/he had always felt like a boy and wanted to be one. His parents are progressive and the family has a close relation with an equally progressive Episcopal parish. After a lot of thought and discussion, the parents went to court and had their son renamed Justin. Then he told them that he would like to be rebaptized with that name.



That was a challenge for the local pastor. She correctly advised them that baptism was baptism and Justin had already been baptized. However she thought of a special blessing ceremony. She not only ran it by the local bishop but it went up to the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry. After much thought and back and forth communication, Justin's blessing was approved.

The church was filled on the day of the ceremony. It was a beautiful rite but two parts of it struck me especially deeply. The priest asked, *Justin do you claim again your identity as a beloved child of God?* And Justin answered, *I do.*

Later the priest turned to the congregation and asked, *Will all you here present do all in your power to love and support this person in his newly revealed life in Christ?* To which there was a resounding, *We will!*

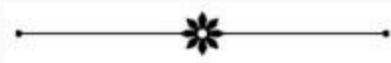
Later Justin's parents asked him how he felt about that day and he responded, *I feel like the luckiest boy in the*

*world.* No more depression.

Like many other issues in a young person's life, his or her gender identity, and their general emotional and spiritual outlook on life, largely depend on the support they receive from those who matter to them. Justin had the backing of his family, the courts, his church, and that enthusiastic congregation who pledged to support him.



I am sure there were people in that congregation who had mixed attitudes about transgender issues when it was an abstract consideration. But when they were looking at this 10-year-old kid, there was no doubt they were going to support him!



When I started writing this Reflection I did not realize that June was LGBTQ+ Pride Month. Then someone here received a notification on social media from a 19-year-old relative in which he announced that he had an orientation different than what friends and family had assumed. He chose Pride Month to reveal this important part of his life. I liked very much how he ended, and it is something we should all remember. He wrote,

*I am not confused. I am not seeking attention. It's not just a phase. This is who I am and who I have always been. I'm proud of who I am and I don't care who knows it! I love you all.*

***Brother Toby***

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