

# TRANS SPIRITUALITY

## A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

\$6.00, or FREE if you don't mind waiting

Issue 02, Spring 2006

First-Ever Study of LGBT-Affirming Religious Organizations

Humor - including Body Language

Religious backlash to GLBT legal protections

Sounding Off!

The Evils of Homoreflexuality

History of this TRD

The New and Improved Galloi/ai

Plus much more...

T\* spirituality online: Yahoo groups

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is a new zine published by Jen Durr Press. It was born from the *Trans-Religious Dialogue*, a process begun among incarcerated T\* whose spirituality is often sharpened by enduring repeated violence to their gifted souls.

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY**  
**A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

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**“Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together.”**

~ Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994)  
Romanian-French dramatist

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# Letters...

*to the Editor*

Dear Editor,

Hi! I hope this letter finds you and everyone in the Trans Spirituality Circle doing well.

Congratulations on the first issue of *Trans Spirituality*. I loved the first issue. I think that it will be a wonderful and exciting forum. I also feel honored to be a Founding Corp Member. And I will try to live up to that honor.

I am going to get the word out to my friends and loved ones on the outside. So that they too may participate in this. I do think that we need to reach out to the widest possible spectrum of the transgender community. There was a good diversity of sections, subjects, and opinions.

The graphics were pretty good too. The Feedback section is a good place to sound off or vent our frustrations. Let's keep in mind to agree to disagree at times, without being too extreme. For example, I may not agree with someone else's concept of the deity or divinity, but I won't disrespect their belief, nor would I challenge their right to hold such a belief.

I liked the T\*Sp Online Digest, cartoons are cool too. All in all I think you all did a good job. I look forward to the next issue.

Blessed be,  
Bella Donna

Dear Editor,

First, the 'zine is absolutely beautiful! A true work of art. (We'll discuss you & "Mandy" hogging up all the photo spots later.)

Definitely liked Carl Gordon's informative article. (Don't necessarily agree with all of its interpretations though.)

And I don't know "where" you came up with "Zoe Kala." But that alter ego was a pleasant surprise.

I would like to express my condolences to the family and friends of Dr. Stanley Barber. I had both the pleasure of meeting him and receiving some pre-op treatments from him some time ago. Truly this pioneer in SRS and overall pre/post op TS treatments will be greatly missed. (He passed on Jan. 16, 2006, for those who haven't heard.)

Big kudos and continued thanks to Steph and Amanda, for making our *Trans Spirituality* dialogue happen. Your individual contributions and sacrifices are greatly appreciated.

Peace and love to all my sista's out there. Live true!

Love,  
Tsunami

*Ed- Zoe Kala is Koine Greek for "Life is Beautiful" – reminding me of that infectious enthusiasm of Roberto Benigni, the director and actor of that 1998 movie. This pseudonym actually came to me years ago, so my embrace of life's beauty was at a time when my surroundings weren't so aesthetic.*

*Ed- Dr. Barber had retired, after his malpractice insurance wasn't renewed, likely because of his advanced age.*

Dear Editor,

Before I say anything I would like to congratulate you on your marvelous accomplishment (obtaining freedom). I know first hand how many people never make it out of the belly of the beast that held you captive. I am so proud that you have reached your freedom goal first and far most. May the blessings that follow be prosperous and plentiful for you my dear comrade, friend, and sistuh. (smile)

I received my first issue of *TRANS SPIRITUALITY* and it was a pure delight for me to see this branch grow from our Trans-Religious Dialogue (TRD). This was the perfect Christmas present! I felt a part of something very special being birthed. Like the baby Amanda always dreamed of having. As one of the Founding Corp. of TRD, I feel like one of the Godmothers of this child of ours. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be a part of the birth of this very special publication. I have read this issue from cover to cover and found it to be just as I thought it would be with Steph as the editor. I humbly give it four stars plus two Snaps Up! "A truly visible labor of love, and informative journalism."

Fresh Ideas simulated my interest and lead me inside of my Bible in search of a better understanding of what I was reading. I enjoyed the entire piece and the points that we were made to consider. We had previously shared on this topic in our TRD. I do not know if I agree with *The da Vinci Codes* indication, or

rather suggestion, that John was transgender and Jesus loved him/hir possibly more intimately than socially accepted. I do think that God created all people in his own image, including (not excluding) trans people – because of their spiritual origin as the original creation in which from God divided into two to create woman. What is most important to me is that I believe that God is love, and Jesus loves me just as I am, for I am.

Big UP's to Donna! Thank you for sharing "Spiritual Protection" with us. It was a reflection that will be helpful to many that get the hook and hold on to it.

"Sounding Off!" Oh my goodness, you girls are truly into diva mode here. I mean girls will be girls, so a few light "hair-pulls" would not hurt the publication as much as it would put some "Oh No, She Didn't!" into it. (smile) I am an advocate of free speech and I agree that if we have a bit of push and pull at times, let freedom ring honey. As long as when all is said and done we still have nothing but love for each other, and a group hug when one is in order.

My girl friend Ms. Tsunami and I have been word swapping since our TRD began. She mentioned her feelings about Steph's response to Ms. Sarah and Johnny's dialogue. I personally did not have a problem with it because the topic was one in which we all shared knowledge and a part of (the resource guided created by Sarah for our previous project given to us by Amanda).

I loved the work that Sarah did for the booklet. I have personally sent this resource info from her to prisoners all over the USA. Many of them continue to write to the Highly Flavored Ministry (HFM) expressing praise and thanks for the contacts they have made from its use. (see HFM advertisement enclosed).

Johnny only stated that some of the addresses were inactive. They were not inactive when placed in Sarah's active files. (Do keep in mind that these resources change all the time, everyday.) Johnny and I have also swapped some words. I find a true loving heart there, and a loving and compassionate person that will give 100% in our struggle to Rize-Up-ism – in our state of captivity with Ms Sarah Babcock.

So I say again, Let The Freedom Bells Ring! As long as it is about topics of interest to all of us and what we are about, honey, I say let the freedom tongue wag!

In sistahood,  
Valjean

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is open to submissions. Material can be submitted to: Steph Turner, *TRANS SPIRITUALITY* Editor, N9494 Haltur Ln., Eagle, WI 53119. We prefer to receive submissions online, at [jendurrpress@gmail.com](mailto:jendurrpress@gmail.com). Material may be edited for space and continuity. Unsolicited material by snail mail cannot be returned without a SASE. Please request our *writer's guidelines*. Payment to writers is a copy of the issue in which the material appears. All rights reserved.

## **TRANS SPIRITUALITY** A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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**Jen Durr Press**

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**Steph Turner**

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Circulation

**Amanda Armstrong**

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is a quarterly zine for demonstrating how the transgender experience includes a rich spiritual dimension. Our initial focus is how T\* inmates are finding incredible ways to apply their spirituality to the challenges of living in a gender-oppressed environment. If their spirituality proves effective for dealing with the challenges they face each day, what does that say about how *we* are integrating our spirituality into *our* daily transgender experience?

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is a public forum for expressing diverse views. Such views are the responsibility of those who express them. These published views are not necessarily those of Jen Durr Press, its staff, or the Founding Corps of the TRD.

## The Evils of the *Homoreflexual* Lifestyle

Issie A. Mann

Note: The previous issue had a piece by Carl Gordon in this section. T-S is still open to "feedback" to the ideas Carl presented. And, of course, your feedback to these new pieces is most welcome.

### Issie A. Mann\*

I am all for greater tolerance of those who are different from myself. Especially if such tolerance is an expression of God's grace and love. But "tolerance" must draw a line somewhere. I am sorry, but I can no longer honestly tolerate the sinful lifestyle of *homoreflexuality* or those who espouse its growing political agenda.

### What's a *homoreflexual*?

*Homoreflexuality* can be defined as "impulsively doing onto others the same form of maltreatment one habitually does to oneself." *Homoreflexuals* tend to repress any emotional energy they have not learned to manage or express in a healthy form. This is especially true for aroused emotions like anger and sexual feelings. Since they have such a low threshold of dealing with these potent emotions, they typically have a long history of over-indulging such feelings, and then vacillating to self-repression.

I can be empathic for anyone in such a vicious cycle. I could even give a caring ear, if they only thought of this as something to get rid of from their lives. But no, they have to suggest that I must be harboring such sentiments as well! Then they have the audacity to impose their liking for self-censorship upon me, denying me my moral integrity.



### It's really a choice

What is disturbing about many of these *homoreflexuals* is their growing belief that their experience is some kind of norm, and that others should respect this is just how they are. As if they were born that way. But I believe they have a choice, that somewhere in life they

“chose” this preference to react to other people’s emotions as if they were their own undisciplined feelings. They just don’t realize how much they have a choice in their reactions.

So they become convinced others are much like they are and must accept their view of reality as the only legitimate one. From their perspective, we are all suffering deep moral dilemmas over peripheral issues of sex and self-control. And



If only they would agree unconditional love is the highest standard, instead of triggering my defenses with their rhetorical potshots.

these narrow moral responses to such issues are allowed to supercede such universal principles as courtesy, grace, respect, love, and the golden rule. For these *homoreflexuals*, this twisting around of ethical priorities isn’t merely a temporal situation. Many of them are convinced this is a normal “lifestyle” that all experience, if only the rest of us would be as honest and repentant as they.

### It’s a kind of lifestyle

As far as I can tell, this lifestyle of theirs leaves little if any room for empathy. How can they express this aspect of love if they cut themselves off from others their lifestyle labels as a threat to be thwarted? Instead of empathizing with others with an open heart and ears, they expect me to go along with their presumptions that those who hold sharply different views ought not to be listened to. It’s enough they celebrate this *homoreflexual* lifestyle, but why bring me into it by expecting me to

agree with them?

Sorry, but I don’t think those who are expanding the human experience in many creative ways are merely rationalizing some lack of sexual discipline. If God wants to challenge my concepts of what is and isn’t “proper sexual expression” then who am I to say, “Oh no, Lord, for nothing unclean has ever entered my vessel!”? Who am I to declare unclean what God in Hir infinite Wisdom has made possible? Whom am I project my

lack of emotional development as the standard for which everyone else must conform?

### It's a denial of need

If this is really about their lack of sexual discipline then I can be compassionate. I'm not insensitive to whatever they

might be struggling with. If only they would explicitly state their needs and quit hiding behind religious rhetoric. If they need me to be more understanding then it would be easier if they invited me with an open heart. If only they would agree unconditional love is the highest standard, instead

of triggering my defenses with their rhetorical potshots. I'm still wondering where they get such "liberal" interpretations of the Bible message that allows them to put me down because I don't yet see their side – that side they haven't graciously shared with me yet.

They show little concern for a *classic conservative* like me, who



Anything that that would place limits on the scope of God's amazing power of Love has to be a serious threat to anyone's spiritual integrity.

not only holds the *golden rule* in highest esteem but fully integrates this blessed principle into my very way of being. For example, I grant them the liberty to express their unique set of needs as I would have them give me the freedom to express mine. I am gracious toward them as I would have them be gracious toward me. But how shall I "tolerate" their lack of grace?

Perhaps my rigid adherence to this ancient tradition of the supremacy of unconditional love comes across as if I am imposing my religious values on them. If it does, well, certainly they are merely projecting their self-righteousness

lifestyle onto me. As much as this lifestyle of theirs limits my opportunities to express unconditional love, then I am convinced it is a dangerous lifestyle! Anything that that would place limits on the scope of God's amazing power of Love has to be a serious threat to anyone's spiritual integrity. And I can tolerate it no more!

\* *Issie* is Steph's FTM persona, with a satirical twist.



## “Being” spiritually transgendered, and not “doing” the world’s divisive things

*Aaron-or-Erin Lee\**

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your minds.” (Romans 12:1a) It occurs to me that this charge from Paul comes naturally to a transgender soul like me. The gender binarism, as a culturally relative construct, is one of the “ways of the world.” I naturally transcend this worldly form, as I discover that perfect will of GOD beyond the limiting imperfections of “gender.”

“Cease striving, and know that I am GOD.” (Psalm 46:10) The renewing of my mind began in earnest when I gave up *striving* to “fit in” to these worldly ways of gender norms. My spiritually blossomed when I finally drank in the grace of GOD that allows me to simply **be** my gifted self.

Before, I use to fit in quite well with the religiosity crowd. Like them, I was a sour-faced prude ready to pounce on any “sinner” who didn’t *conform* to what I was sure was the “truth.” I was easily repulsed by those who reminded me too much about what I hated within myself, all that jazz I didn’t understand. I provoked other’s defensiveness as my defensiveness



stood high. “That same measure you give will be measured back to you.” (Matthew 7:2)

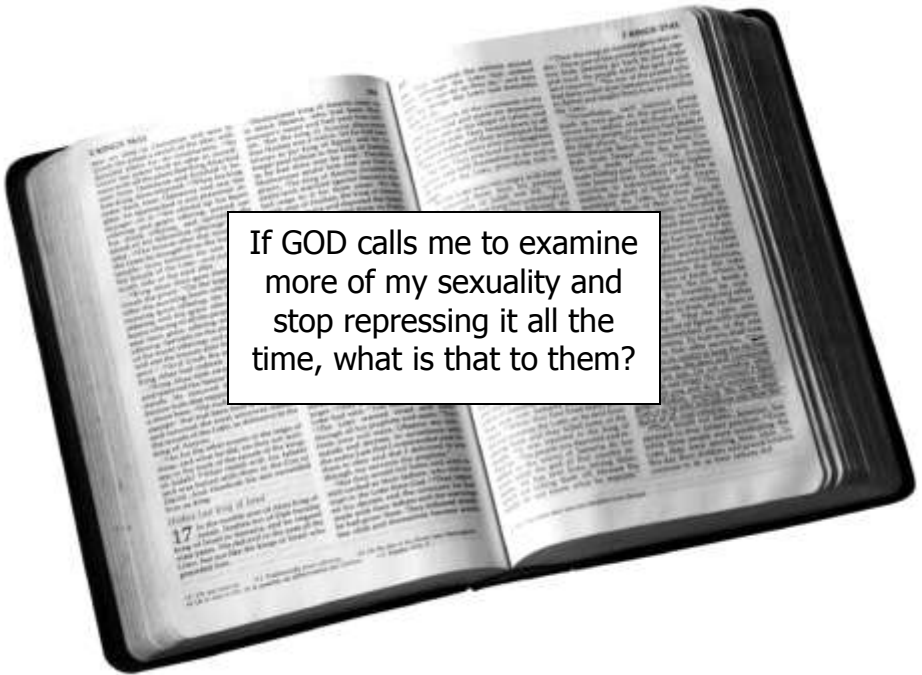
The more I strived to hold back my God-given potential, the more nature counteracted with an eroticized desire to be my true self. Alarming at first, but it makes sense to me now. GOD created inside me these built-in mechanisms to remain obedient to my calling. I feared giving into this desire meant I was being irresponsible. I finally learned to **be** responsible when I quit responding to religious dogma and listen to that still small voice within. Indeed, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” (Psalm 139:14)

“Do not judge by appearances.” (John 7:24) By all appearances, I must admit, allowing my sexual

energies to take me down some uncharted course isn't a normal mode of spirituality. In fact, it was terrifying at times. To be sure, such indulgence in another context has led many to moral traps and even sexual addiction. Some of these were my friends. "But those who compare themselves by themselves

laid out for me, and not for them. (John 21:22)

"Humankind looks at the way things are outwardly. But GOD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)  
Outwardly I have a socialized façade called "gender" that is suppose to help me locate myself into some role within society. GOD



If GOD calls me to examine more of my sexuality and stop repressing it all the time, what is that to them?

or measure themselves by themselves are not wise." (2 Corinthians 10:12)

If GOD calls others to curb their sexual appetites, what is that to me? If GOD calls me to examine more of my sexuality and stop repressing it all the time, what is that to them? I shall follow the path

has a role for me that is so much bigger, so much grander. No, it doesn't make me better. It does, however, make me more of a misfit. But being a misfit for GOD, transgender and all, is quite an honor. "For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

\* Aaron-or-Erin is Steph's bigender persona.

## The New and Improved Galloi/ai

Bella Donna Night Raven

I read with great interest Mandy's article regarding the Galloi/Gallai. The whole concept of transgender priestesses who undergo physical changes in the service of the Goddess, and as a form of worship, is one near and dear to my heart and Soul.

Mandy raises some serious and valid ethical issues with the actual practice and Roman laws related to Galloi/ai. Such as who could become one, and the involuntary castration of slaves and children. As with many ancient religious practices the "form and practice related to the worship of the Goddess Cybele" would not be a moral, ethical, or legal matter in many instances in today's world.

Any revival of practices, lifestyle, and worship of the old Galloi/ai would have to conform in many ways to the reality of today. But there is so much that we can practice and that we have in common with them. It would not be reaching too far to take their name, adopt the old ways, modify what is needed, and create new traditions. And I am sure that I am not the first one to recognize this.

Aside from the spiritual aspects of a renewed and recognized Worship of Cybele by Galloi/ai who are or will be willingly and

properly castrated (under medical supervision), there would be certain legalistic benefits to practicing our transgender form of spirituality in the form of an ancient religious practice that has been modernized.

I for one would like to do more research about the ancient practice, and also make contact with those who are reviving and practicing it in it's modern form. But alas due to my incarceration I am limited in what I can do. If I hear anything new I will be sure to share it with you. And if anyone out there cares to share what they know I would be glad to hear from them.

As a transgender person and as a Goddess worshiper, the path of the Galloi/ai appeals to me on so many levels. I think it is also a logical and intuitive aspect of the transgender experience.

Those of us who are not genetic or natural born women are sometimes excluded from certain forums due to that. As a Galloi/ai we have our own unique venue from which we cannot be excluded.

I hope in the future to be able to expound more upon this topic. In the mean time, take care...and may the Goddess smile upon you and all that you do. *Blessed be.*

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## SOUNDING OFF!

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### **Discontent in the Hoosier State** by Valjean Royal

In November 2005 the state of Indiana passed an ordinance that became a major victory for the GLBT society in the Hoosier state. This ordinance prohibits discrimination towards GLBTs in housing and employment.

Among the people that spoke on the house floor was a female that was fired from her job when she informed her boss that she was gay. I could not believe how some people's civil rights were still being so bluntly denied due to their romantic/sexual preference.

Being of Christian faith, I simply said a prayer and placed it in the hands of our Lord. The morning that the ordinance was to go to the floor for a vote, I eagerly watched the news for the results. To my amazement there on the screen appeared several African American ministers gathered in the lobby entrance of the state house in a circle of prayer "for the denial of this ordinance."

They stated that if this thing passed that it would condone and be an invitation for the sinful lifestyle of homosexuality. I got so very angry witnessing this false display of Christianity. How could these men of African American descent stand there and state to the world on national television that they support inflicting the wrath of discrimination and oppression upon any person?

To deny a qualified person the

opportunity for employment and/or residence for any reason is a slap in the face. This contradicts some of the most novel biblical scriptures known in today's society: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 19:19b) "But you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:18b) Last but not least, "By this we know love, because he laid down His life for us." (1 John 3:16a)

I was not only angry, but also hurt. Some of these ministers are a part of the prison ministry that serves here and with whom I have worshipped for several years. I do not know why they were not praying that no one be discriminated against on a job site, not if they are skillful and healthy enough to do the job. I don't know why they were not praying that no one be denied shelter, only because someone other than God passed judgment on them. Where is the "love thy neighbor" in this?

I was so discouraged. But then I remembered, these *are* the last days. So again I prayed and placed all my hurt, pain and anger in the hands of our Lord Father God. I trust that he will work it all out because it is his fight, not mine. I gave it all to him. I gave in to faith. A faith that is evident the ministers that prayed for discrimination and oppression did not possess.

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My final words to “*Sounding Off*” comes from a letter written to Amanda “Mandy” Armstrong on January 6, 2004 - during her internship at TransZine/Books ThroughBars.

I am still very much fascinated by this book that you sent to me, “*Crossing Over*” by Vanessa Sheridan. Have you read this book? The reason I ask you this is because you asked me about being Christian and gender variant. This book is closer to how I feel spiritually about my place in the church as a transwoman than any book I have ever read besides the bible.

I look at it like this – we are all God’s children. And he gave his only son because of his love for us all. Our life is a gift and we have to view it as such.

Being a gender variant person is also a gift from God. When we have accepted this fact, only then have we accepted God as our Lord and Savior, and no weapon raised upon us shall prosper.

The battle for total acceptance in the church is no longer our fight because we can comfortably place it in the hands of God. With faith we can know he will take care of it and things will change. As more and more gender variant people take their place in worship without being afraid, but being delivered from fear, the more the Lord is going to work through our love for mankind. Our forgiving hearts towards those that attempt to deny true freedom expresses a deeper spirituality than those that are just trying to judge others, and appoint who they feel are worthy to be children of the King of Kings.

These are the ones that need our prayers, as we need the prayers of each other. So my dear sistuh M. Armstrong, do not let your journey into the house of the Lord ever be anything other than a sincere desire to worship and give praise! It is not

important what other members of the church may think. It is God who we are there to give the focus of our attention, all our praise and glory.

I know how you feel. I have not always felt what I feel today. I was not always willing to give what I felt was my battle over to faith. I felt like some kind of mistake.

When I finally learned that we are not a mistake I was able to accept my Christian faith and apply it to my daily life. Then I became convinced that we are precious, infinitely valuable human beings made in the image of God – and no one has the right to attempt to convince us otherwise.

I began to seek the truth about the theology that caused me and others to feel this gender variance was some kind of curse. The truth was painfully familiar. Being that I am also African American, I am well acquainted with this suffered pattern of discrimination and oppression. Those claiming to live by the bible originally banned my people from reading, even the bible. Back then, my people couldn’t even attend church or school. When they could, they were kept from freely choosing which churches and schools to attend. They too were considered a cursed people, right here in our beloved America, by so-called American Christians who were pathetically slow to realize the lingering evils of enslavement and segregation.

So this alone lets me know that, as Vanessa Sheridan states in this book *Crossing Over*, “The world needs more compassion and humanity, not more spiritual self-importance or religious conceit. We need people who care more about following the example of Jesus, doing the work of justice, and serving the living God than they do about idolatrously and dogmatically falling at your feet of a literalist interpretive tradition.”

**Love, Valjean**

## If a challenging image can provoke so much violence... Tsunami Caryl Averlyn



I feel compelled to speak on a sure tragedy that unfolded recently overseas. As I write this it continues in our headlines. Apparently a Danish newspaper

printed a cartoon caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam. He penned their Holy Book, the Qur'an, as revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. But this cartoonist believed "freedom of speech" gave him the right to characterize the Prophet Muhammad as some kind of contemporary terrorist.

This provoked various Muslims to demonstrate and protest, as it is forbidden in Islam to depict *any* images or pictures of Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, in response to the initial demonstrations and unrest, several European newspapers picked up the cartoon and ran it in their newspapers, along with other new cartoon caricatures of Prophet

Muhammad. This added insult to injury in the eyes of many Muslims, escalating the demonstrations to full rioting in some areas. Many injuries soon followed, along with a few deaths.

I can't help but ask myself if this is *really* worth it?!?!

Regardless of what are an individual's religious beliefs or spiritual expressions, is there ever *really* a time worth killing for them...or seriously injuring another? Most of the religious/spiritual doctrines I have studied are strictly against this. Indeed, most offer multiple ways to express disagreement, cure conflict, etc., and the few that do mention physical violence (Islam included) state it is to be used as a last resort, in *defense*.

I am amazed (although I guess I should not be) that I live in a world where human beings could be led





to kill other human beings over a cartoon. Think about that for a minute, isn't it spooky? I mean what is *really* next?!

When I look at these peoples' faces on the news and in the newspapers, I can see, feel, and sense their overwhelming hatred. No doubt, the cartoons just ignited other hidden, brewing animosities. But still, it is so sad for us as a human race to *hate* each so much. And over seemingly and a continuing lack of understanding and *tolerance*.

I'm sure many of us in the T\* community can relate to being the target of such animosity because others failed to appreciate our unique expressions. No doubt many of us have experienced such hatred from time to time, even threatened with or have endured violence in the name of religion.

Convincingly, it gives more reason and conviction for one to want to achieve spiritual apex. Because one thing is for sure, and it is certain, we (the human race) are headed for self-destruction. It's just a matter of time.



## Body Language

*insightful humor by Zoe Kala*



## History of the TRD

### *TRD Past Reflections Valjean Royal*



In the “History Of The TRD” (maybe this can be added as a regular section) the TIP Journal was mentioned as where we all joined in our association. “History Of The TRD” would be an ideal section to feature some of our very first encounters. My first submission for this section is titled “TRD Past Reflections.”

(a) **ATTENTION ARTIST, WRITERS, ACTIVISTS, and REGULAR FOLKS!** When I first noticed these words above printed on the flyer inside of an issue of my *TIP Journal*, I had no idea that this solicitation was about to become a center piece in my life that would carry me, well informed, into a journey all of it's own. Thank you, Amanda, for the door that led us all together in our own personal/individual space in *Trans Spirituality*.

(b) **Dear Valjean "Pinkie Royal** Letter from *Trans Spirituality* editor Steph Turner, dated 08/05/04.) Steph has always been one that expresses her spirituality well, and with an open heart, mind

and soul towards the beliefs for others. Even if she doesn't fully agree with you – she will let you know with honesty and sincerity how she feels, but with such grace and knowledge you will come to her conclusion or do the research to find your own! All being the makings of a perfect editor for what this publication is all about, *TRANS SPIRITUALITY*. (Ed- Ah, shucks!)

(c) **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY** submitted by Caryl Tsunami Averlyn. Tsunami was featured in our first issue of *TRANS SPIRITUALITY* “Sounding Off.” As you can see from this 2004 submission, this girl rarely if ever holds back. (SMILE) Love you, Tsunami girlfriend....

Again, I thank you and I have a special place in my heart for all of you. May God bless us all and may 2006 be safe and a very amazing year for all. I will look forward to our next shared spaces.



**Attention Artists, Writers, Activists, and Regular Folks!**

As part of my work with the Philadelphia Books Through Bars Collective, I am working on compiling a booklet composed of writing and artwork by transgender, transsexual, gender variant, and/or two-spirit people who are living in prison. I am hoping that you can help me out.

**Here's the basic plan:**

Right now I am sending out requests for writing and artwork dealing with what it's like to be trans/two spirit/gender variant in prison. I am asking that individuals mail their submissions to me before April 1st, 2004. After receiving all of the work, I will compile a booklet that is filled with most of the work received. In addition to this work, the booklet will include a list of resources available for gender variant folks in prison; and an extensive listing of books, magazines, and 'zines geared towards gender variant communities, including information about how to get these reading materials for free or at low cost. Finally, the booklet will contain a pen-pal section, in which people in prison interested in corresponding with others will have a space to say what kinds of communication they desire. When completed, the booklet will be sent at no cost to all of the contributors and at low or no cost to any other prisoners interested in a copy. I hope that this project will help to increase the self-determination of trans, two spirit, and/or gender variant people in prison.

**How you can participate:**

**If you are a transgendered, transsexual, gender variant, and/or two-spirit person and have ever been, or are currently, in prison:**

Please consider submitting a piece of writing or artwork to be included in the booklet. (I'm interested in making this booklet as inclusive as possible, so if you don't identify with any of these terms but feel like your gender doesn't fit neatly into a box of male or female, and/or you face violence or disrespect based in part on your gender presentation, I would be interested in receiving your work.) Submissions must be sent before April 1st, 2004. I am looking for anything that relates to the experiences of being trans/two spirit/gender variant in prison, including stories about:

- discrimination and/or violence faced behind bars
- lack of) access to hormones and other medical procedures/attention
- gender segregated spaces in prison
- working with activist or legal support groups
- access to reading materials geared towards trans/two spirit/gender variant communities
- any other issues that you are interested in writing about

If you have ideas or designs for the booklet's layout, title, or cover, I would like to use these designs and ideas. Additionally, if there are reading materials that you are having trouble accessing, I will include information within the booklet about possible ways to access these titles from prison at low cost or for free. Additionally, while I can't promise this, there is a very small chance that I will be able to find free copies of the titles that you are interested in.

**If you plan to send submissions to me:**

Initially, please send a letter communicating your intentions to submit a piece, including, if possible, a brief description of what you plan to submit. Also, I want to compensate you based on your determination of the value of your work. However, I can't promise any compensation beyond a copy of the completed booklet. Some possible forms of compensation might include: art supplies that I can access at low or no cost, or copies of donated books or magazines. Let me know what works for you regarding compensation, and I will, in turn, let you know whether this works for me. Additionally, I will do everything in my power to return the master copy of your submissions to you. Finally, and most importantly, I want to be accountable to you throughout the process of making and distributing the booklet. Please send me any and all criticisms, rants, thoughts, inspirations, or concerns related to this project - I really want to work together with you to craft the best, most useful booklet possible.

**If you know of resources aimed at empowering trans/two spirit/gender variant prisoners:**

Please send me all relevant information about these resources, including descriptions of any experiences that you have had in relation to these resources (i.e., delivering them, attempting to access them).

**If you have written 'zines or books dealing with how to increase the self determination of trans/two spirit/gender variant communities:**

Please consider agreeing to send your writing free of charge, or at low cost, to people in prison. You can donate any texts by sending them directly to Books Through Bars. If you are interested in having your work listed in the booklet, please contact me.

**PLEASE DISTRIBUTE THIS CALL WIDELY!**

To Contact or send works to me:

Send letters to: TransZine/Books Through Bars, 4722 Baltimore Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143. Attn: Amanda

If you have access to the internet, send emails to Amanda at [marmstr1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:marmstr1@swarthmore.edu)

NOTE: This is no longer her snail mail or email address.

About me: i am a 21 year-old transgirl who lives in west Philadelphia. These days, i'm working as intern at the Philadelphia Books Through Bars Collective and want to become more active in local struggles for justice and community self-support. i enjoy talking with others about radical theology, feminism, stencil/aerosol art, and ghosts - and would love for you to send me letters.

8-5-04

Dear Valjean "Pinkie" Royal,

I wrote to you a couple years ago, if you recall. I received your first reply but never got a reply after my follow-up letter. I have no way of knowing if you never received my second letter back then, or if I didn't receive your second letter. Now with Amanda forwarding our letters, I can trust our attempt at correspondence is less likely to be lost in the institutional mail.

After reading your 'Opening Statement' I realized the pagination was a bit off. Page 2 is actually page 3 and page 3 is actually page 2, right? Your written prayer made more sense to me while reading it in this order.

Praise GOD for Hir grace, for reaching out to each of us in our foibles. In my Opening Statement I forget to include my new mailing address. I can receive mail directly, but perhaps sending it through Amanda will help ensure it arrives.

I found your opening prayer to be encouraging and proactive, as Jesus called us to be in our difficult moments. Transcending the old conventions of retaliation (an eye for an eye...) is something I believe we as gender-gifted souls are uniquely enabled to do, if we only realize our gender-giftedness includes a profound spiritual dimension. And I now trust you do.

I appreciate your seven insights, and sense these items are merely a highlight of all that you have learned about spiritual transformation and growth in your gender journey. A pivotal point in my spiritual gender journey was God's direction, in response to my prayer, to consider the Spirit's words to Peter while on Cornelius's rooftop (Acts 10: 15). "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." With this spiritual insight I was able to escape the darkness of my shamed past and step into the light of GOD's magnificent glory surrounding my true self. By GOD's grace and love I could now "renounce the things hidden because of shame,"

such as an overdependence upon the gender binarism. (2 Cor. 4: 2) By GOD's grace and love, I no longer suffered the ignorant shaming of my authentic self, now brought into the light of glory.

Because we inherently transcend the corrupting social conventions of this temporal world we can say boldly: We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." (2 Cor. 4:8-9) It's almost as if we who transcend the temporal conventions of this passing world are better equipped to truly live the gospel in all its divine richness.

This spiritual journey, gender-gifted and all, has now taken me beyond the cultural trappings of Americanized Christianity. I respect the need of the typical Christian to find a culturally relevant context for experiencing and expressing their faith in God through who they understand Jesus to be. But my life is responding to an inward pull towards greater spiritual insight, one that is inevitably alien to them. Just as a prophet is not welcomed in his hometown, neither is the "transspirit" who doesn't cater to local social norms. Especially if we don't express the same felt need for gender barriers.

My understanding of trans-spirituality has emerged within the context of my evangelical background, even as it transcended much of the cultural context of American Christianity. For me, "trans-religious" means not merely "transgender religion" but more poignantly "transcending religious barriers" much in the way we transcend religious barriers. As a fellow trans Christian, I am eager to see if this concept of transspirituality strikes a chord with you in your spiritual journey. Even as I keep my heart open to your original insights. God bless, and live true!

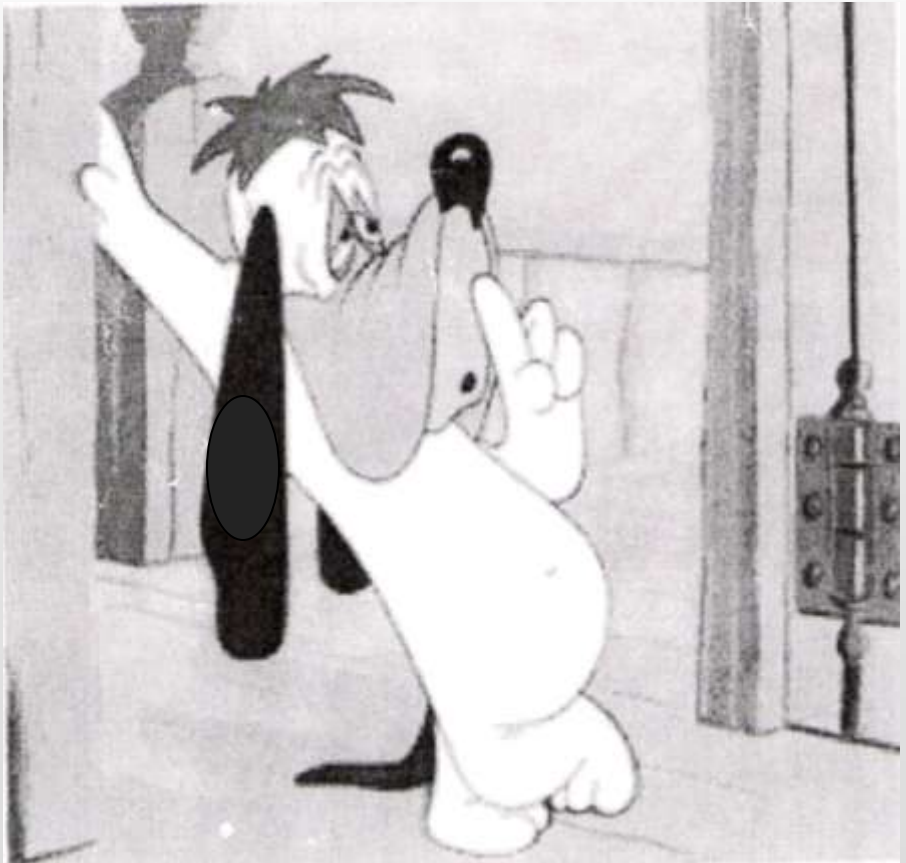
In gender loving care,

Steph

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

*Never hold your farts in.*

*They travel up your spine, into your brain,  
and that is where shitty ideas come from!!!*



# First-Ever Study of LGBT-Affirming Religious Organizations Released

02.02.06

Source: [www.gaywired.com](http://www.gaywired.com)

(Washington, D.C.) — The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force National Religious Leadership Roundtable has released a groundbreaking study on the resources, challenges and opposition to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-affirming religious organizations. The study, *David v. Goliath: A Report on Faith Groups Working for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality (and What They're Up Against)*, by Richard A. Lindsay and Jessica Stern, surveys 29 organizations, including large denominations and independent congregations.

“This report shows that some of the most important debate over lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality is not happening in Congress, but in religious denominations,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “The organizations in this report, and many others like them, are winning the hearts and minds of people of faith in spite of tremendous obstacles

and meager resources — it's truly David v. Goliath.”

In recent years, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have faced unprecedented attacks from a highly organized religious right. *David v. Goliath* outlines the “parallel” progressive faith movement that welcomes LGBT people, and has grown simultaneously with the secular

“This report shows that some of the most important debate over lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality is not happening in Congress, but in religious denominations.”

rights movement. It reveals the intense opposition to these progressive faith groups and the huge

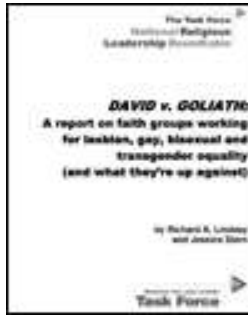
forces waged against them by the anti-LGBT industry, which has unabashedly and effectively rallied conservative people of faith to its cause.

The report includes large denominations and independent congregations such as the United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist Association and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah; LGBT denominational affinity groups such as DignityUSA (Catholic LGBT organization) and

the Institute for Welcoming Resources (mainline Protestant LGBT organization); and “bridge-building” organizations such as Al-Fatiha (Muslim LGBT organization) and Queer Asian Spirit, which explore the intersections of religious or ethnic minority identities and LGBT identity.

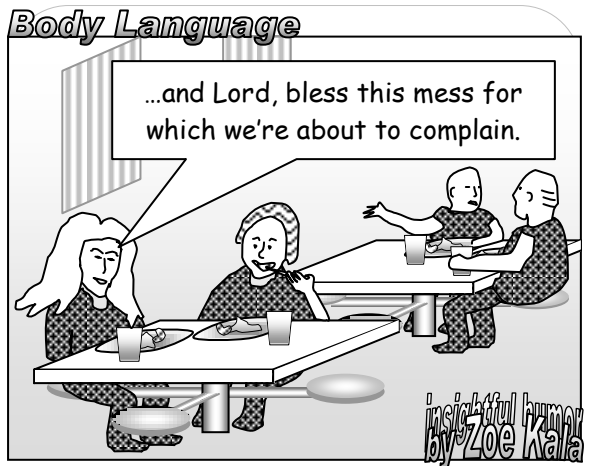
Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, executive officer of the Institute for Welcoming Resources, said, “There has been a concerted effort from the conservative political establishment, through secular organizations like the Institute on Religion and Democracy, to influence the mainline Protestant churches, create schism on the issue of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people, and lure the denominations into a hard-right ideology, which would represent a vast and historic shift in the nation's religious landscape.”

David v. Goliath also reports on faith organizations outside the mainline denominations that are working with populations that face issues of intersecting identities of ethnicity, race, national origin, gender or HIV-positive status, combined with being LGBT.

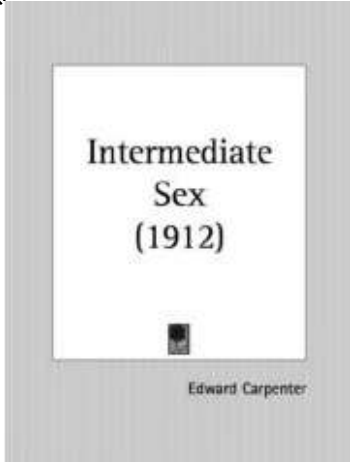


**DAVID v. GOLIATH:**  
*A report on faith groups working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality (and what they're up against)*  
 (January 31, 2006)  
 Available online as a 60-page PDF file.

“When you're black, HIV-positive and transgender, and you are looking for a faith community to support you with your physical, emotional and spiritual needs, you are in the most absolutely vulnerable position of people in our society,” said Bishop Yvette Flunder, founder and senior pastor of City of Refuge Church in San Francisco. “Someone's got to provide the bridge for people at the intersection of these identities to connect them to the services they need. Someone's got to give them the loving community they need to survive.”



## **The Intermediate Sex, *Edward Carpenter*** Book Review by Mandy Armstrong



Edward Carpenter, one of the earliest out gay men in European history to publicly organize on behalf of the rights of sexual and gender minorities, was born into an English middle class family in 1844. Opting for a life of study rather than one of military service, Carpenter entered Cambridge in 1864 and enjoyed success as an academic until 1873, at which time he experienced a political conversion.

This conversion-experience instilled in him the conviction that he should, “go and make my life with the mass of the people and the manual workers.” From the moment of his conversion into socialist politics until his death in 1923, Carpenter worked alongside the English labor movement, articulating a utopian ideal and engaging in organizing work in order to bring this ideal into being.

### **Suggesting what went wrong with society**

According to Carpenter’s political thought, modern systems of law and economics are responsible for severely stifling women and men’s’ natural creativity and compassion. In modern society, according to Carpenter, human bodies are regimented and regulated by various social institutions, including religious, legal, and political institutions.

These institutions, he argues, alienate individuals’ conscious minds from their bodies, and force us to conform to systems of rationality and order that differ sharply from the natural and organic principles of order that all of us can learn simply by attending closely to the desires of our own bodies.

### **Suggesting there has always been a remedy**

Carpenter articulates these political views in an essay entitled *The Intermediate Sex*. In this 1908 essay, Carpenter argues that the systems of binary gender differentiation, compulsory heterosexuality, and monogo-

mous marriage improperly stifle our natural sexual practices and gender expressions. For Carpenter, “Intermediate Types” of humans—that is, people who have a “balance” of masculine and feminine traits, including men who enjoy artistic and spiritual pursuits and women who enjoy strenuous physical activity—reveal the truest form of human nature, the peak of evolutionary perfection. (*Ed- \*Expanded into a full volume in 1912?*)

Instead of holding these individuals up as ideals, however, modern society banishes them to its margins. For Carpenter, society’s redemption will come about through the rise to prominence and power of these “Intermediate Types.” He argues that this group is “destined to form the advance guard of that great movement which will one day transform the common life by substituting the bond of personal affection and compassion for the monetary, legal and other external controls that now control and confine society.”

### **Challenging the prevailing academic views**

By suggesting that gender non-conforming people might be the vanguard of a more perfect society, Carpenter turned 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century social Darwinism on its head. For many social Darwinists, including many of the early sexologists (scientists who studied the lives of sexual and gender non-conformists), the rise of gay, lesbian, and transgender subcultures in European and American cities revealed the extent to which modern society had “degenerated” from its supposedly more pristine origins.

Many of these social Darwinists advocated repressive state action against poor people, mentally ill people, Jewish people, people of color, and LGBT people in order to undermine these groups’ ability to thrive, produce children, and ultimately survive. This type of eugenicist thinking ultimately came to inform state policies in various ways, most extremely in the genocidal violence enacted against Jews and homosexuals in German concentration camps during World War II. It also came close to home in the widespread forced sterilization of women of color and poor women that took place in the United States up through the 1960’s and 70’s.

*Continues on next page...*

\* *The Intermediate Sex*, Edward Carpenter (Kessinger Publishing, 1942 reprints).  
Paperback available at Amazon.com for \$15.61 (list price \$22.95) 178 pages. ISBN:  
0766107450. Dimensions: 10.5 x 8.0 x 0.4 inches. Shipping Weight: 13.6 oz.

## Challenging academic views on religious history

Now, you might be wondering what all of this has to do with religion. In short, Edward Carpenter believed that religious issues were always also political issues, and that the transformation of society necessitated a transformation in religious beliefs and practices. In order to help bring about these transformations in religious practice, Carpenter put his academic training in anthropology and history to work, attempting to turn dominant accounts of religious history (which were heavily indebted to Evolutionist and racialist theories) on their heads.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in England, the most widely accepted account of religious history was the one contained within Sir James G. Frazer's massive tome, *The Golden Bough*. An entire chapter of this volume is devoted to a discussion of the role of the Galli in the history of religion. In this chapter Frazer argues that,

The worship of the Great Mother of the Gods and her lover or son (Attis) was very popular under the Roman Empire.... The religion of the Great Mother, with its curious blending of crude savagery with spiritual aspirations, was only one of a multitude of similar Oriental faiths which in the later days of paganism spread over the Roman Empire, and by saturating the European peoples with alien ideals of life gradually undermined the whole fabric of ancient civilization.... A general disintegration of the body politic set in. The tides of the state and of the family were loosened: the structure of society tended to resolve itself into its individual elements and thereby to relapse into barbarism; for civilization is only possible through the active co-operation of the citizens and their willingness to subordinate their private interests to the common good. Men refused to defend their country and even to continue their kind. In their anxiety to save their own souls and the souls of others, they were content to leave the material world, which they identified with the principle of evil, to perish around them. This obsession lasted for a thousand years. The revival of Roman law, of the Aristotelian philosophy, of ancient art and literature at the close of the Middle Ages, marked the return of Europe to native ideals of life and conduct, to saner, manlier views of the world. The long halt in the march of civilization was over. The tide of Oriental invasion had turned at last. It is ebbing still.

For Frazer, the secularization of modern European history constituted a return to "manliness," and a rejection of the "Oriental influences." Frazer was convinced this "savagery" had entered Europe first through the Galli, and then, in a slightly less shocking form, through Christian renunciants. In contrast to Frazer, who sees the Galli as having caused social decay and degeneration, Carpenter sees the Galli as having brought about social advancement.

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### Suggesting a pattern of history

In explaining the progressive role played by the Galli in history, Carpenter initially suggests that human history can be divided into three epochs: 1) a pre-conscious “primitive” epoch<sup>1</sup>, 2) an epoch defined by the extension of rationality and human self-consciousness into all spheres of life, and 3) an epoch defined by the reigning-in of the conscious mind and the re-emergence of natural and organic principles of social organization. For Carpenter, “Intermediate Types” are responsible for bringing about the transition of society from one epoch to the next.



**Edward Carpenter** (c. 1875) (29 August 1844 – 28 June 1929). Socialist poet, anthologist, and an early homosexual activist.

We have already seen how he conceptualized the role of Intermediate Types in bringing about the transition from the second epoch into the yet-to-be-realized third epoch. In a similar way, he argued that the Galli—and other “Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk” (the title of one of his final books)—were responsible for bringing about the transition from the first to the second epoch.

According to Carpenter, people living within “primitive societies” are not yet able to alter their collective lives based on the dictates of reason. Carpenter asserts that such societies are defined by a rigid differentiation of social roles into two categories: reproduction (assigned to women) and warfare (assigned to men).

He argues that the presence of Intermediate Types within “primitive societies” introduces an anomaly into the social order (as feminine men would not be fit for either warfare or childbearing, and masculine women would similarly not easily fit into either of these roles), leading to the emergence of new social roles (including priestly roles) to be filled by “Intermediate Types.” As priests, these “Intermediate Types” develop and hone their self-conscious and rational capacities, thus enabling a transition from the first epoch of history to the second.

### Challenging Carpenter's suggestions

In his account of the three-fold nature of history, and especially in his understanding of "primitive society," Carpenter posits himself in the myopic thinking of his times. It betrays the extent to which social Darwinist thought continued to influence his understanding of history and society, even though he had firmly rejected the political program of eugenics.

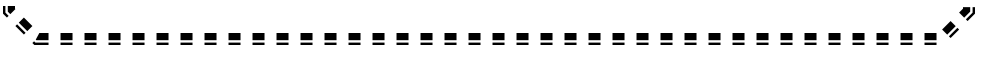
Carpenter asserts that contemporary African and South Asian communities still reside within the "primitive epoch" of history<sup>2</sup>. He argues that the colonization of such communities is ultimately in their interests, as it promises to bring them into the second epoch of history. Thus, in his explicit support of European colonial violence, Carpenter reveals the limits of his emancipatory political vision.

Nonetheless, I am inspired by his forceful critique of homophobic and transphobic scholarship on the Galli and his abiding commitment to gender and sexual equality.

### *Editor's two cents (again)*

<sup>1</sup> (Ed- Despite having a pejorative connotation in "civilized" societies of the West, the word "primitive" holds special meaning for me as a transgender Amerindian. Primitive points to the foundation of existence, before the many forms of social constructs were ever formalized. Primitive points to a basic culture more in tune to the balancing rhythms of nature, before social units were divided up and pitted against one another. Primitive points to a more connected level of existence, where differentiation between the genders was far more fluid. Primitive is where I exist in wholeness. Civilization? Well, not that there's anything wrong with that!)

<sup>2</sup> (Ed- Another viable perspective is to see enduring tribal cultures as those more adaptive to their environments, revealing a more advanced design. Those cultures ill adapted to their environments were compelled to continue altering their design, especially as their changes continued to alter their environment. This principle applies to evolution as well. The turtle has not changed much in the last million years, suggesting a more advanced design. Primates like us, on the other hand, have been compelled to adjust to our comparatively inferior designs. However, structural designs requiring adaptations are more prone to develop remarkable potentials. And this balances with the more structurally pure forms in existence, in this grand web of life. One appears better than the other largely from the meaning ascribed to its myopic familiarity. Some food for thought I hope will not give anyone indigestion.)



## Select quotes from Carpenter and his colleagues

That there are distinctions and gradations of Soul- material in relation to Sex--that the inner psychical affections and affinities shade off and graduate, in a vast number of instances, most subtly from male to female, and not always in obvious correspondence with the outer bodily sex--is a thing evident enough to anyone who considers the subject; nor could any good purpose well be served by ignoring this fact--even if it were possible to do so. It is easy of course (as some do) to classify all these mixed or intermediate types as bad. It is also easy (as some do) to argue that just because they combine opposite qualities they are likely to be good and valuable. But the subtleties and complexities of Nature cannot be despatched in this off-hand manner. The great probability is that, as in any other class of human beings, there will be among these too, good and bad, high and low, worthy <p. 11> and unworthy--some perhaps exhibiting through their double temperament a rare and beautiful flower of humanity; others a perverse and tangled ruin.

Of course wherever this subject touches on the domain of love we may expect difficult queries to arise. Yet it is here probably that the noblest work of the intermediate sex or sexes will be accomplished, as well as the greatest errors committed. It seems almost a law of Nature that new and important movements should be misunderstood and vilified--even though afterwards they may be widely approved or admitted to honour. Such movements are always envisaged first from whatever aspect they may possibly present, of ludicrous or contemptible. The early Christians, in the eyes of Romans, were chiefly known as the perpetrators of obscure rites and crimes in the darkness of the catacombs. <13>

"In every human being there are present both male and female elements, only in normal persons (according to their sex) the one set of elements is more greatly developed than the other. The chief difference in the case of homosexual persons is that in them the male and female elements are more equalized; so that when, in addition, the general development is of a high grade, we find among this class the most perfect types of humanity."--Dr. ARDUIN, "Die Frauenfrage," <p. 141> in *Jahrbuch der Sexuellen Zwischenstufen*, vol. ii., p. 217. Leipzig, 1900.

"There are transitional forms between the metals and non-metals; between chemical combinations and simple mixtures, between animals and plants, between phanerogams and cryptogams, and between mammals and birds. . . . The improbability may henceforth be taken for granted of finding in Nature a sharp cleavage between all that is masculine on the one side and all that is feminine on the other; or that any living being is so simple in this respect that it can be put wholly on one side, or wholly on the other, of the line." O. WEININGER.

"The notion that human beings were originally hermaphroditic is both ancient and widespread. We find it in the book of Genesis, unless indeed there be a confusion here between two separate theories of creation. God is said to have first made man in His image, male and female in one body, and to have bidden them multiply. Later on He created the woman out of part of this primitive man." --HAVELOCK ELLIS, "Sexual Inversion," p. 229.

# ***T\*Sp Online Digest***

## **Steph**

This feature is meant to be a kind of zine inside a zine. Each quarter we will try to highlight the "trans spirituality" that is online. And there is plenty.

### **So much for blogging**

The "blogosphere" is more for those with the time to devote to it. By the time I got back to working on my third entry the blogger website had changed its format and "poof" our blogs were gone. Oh well. By then I was moving on to something I though would be more to our needs: Yahoo groups. (And no one to date has asked me to check those links I published in the last issue.)

### **Yahoo groups**

By the time I sent off the last issue to Mandy for distribution I was investigating different Yahoo groups. There are thousands, including those addressing transgender spirituality. In fact, one is named *TransSpirituality*. Gee, awfully close to our name! I joined and enjoyed the following exchange. (Note how I stopped getting feedback the more I became verbose, ah, expressive.)

(These are in the "daily digest" format.)

Message: 1

Date: Sun, 18 Dec 2005 20:40:51 -0000

From: "jendurrserv"

<jendurrserv@yahoo.com>

Subject: New member introducing himself

I saw Neil's reply to Diane Palmer at Digest Number 233 and thought I would visit the website Neil mentioned: [www.venicetemple.com](http://www.venicetemple.com). Something in this Hindu site caught me eye:

"Self Realization/// Come to know the distinctions between our intrinsic self and our casual extrinsic acquired nature. By harmonizing with our intrinsic nature we can achieve a greater awareness of the real self."

I am an androgyne who transcends the gender divide on an intrinsic level. My spirit intuitively transcends any polarity that threatens to limit my spiritual potential. Including the limits imposed by the gender binarism.

I experience this transcendence at a deeper level of spiritual encounter, where even the distinction between my individual personhood and the substance of all other existence is ultimately transcended. Such transcendence of distinction builds a more durable bridge between what is seen as competing opposites in this outer world of appearances. In my gender journey I have been experiencing more of this "communion" between my spirit being and my physical being, as I find more effective ways to integrate my feminine and masculine energies within and without.

Besides being both feminine and masculine, I am both religious and irreligious, I am both Christian and nonchristian, I am both Native American and nonnative. I am compelled by spiritual energy to I encounter a fuller dimension of existence, or purposeful being, beyond temporal matters that so easily divide us. I exist in this transcendent realm of exquisite "connection" and wonder if other T\* can relate. If you care to explore this line of thought then I invite you to respond.

In gender loving care,

steph

Message: 2

Date: Sun, 18 Dec 2005 23:10:26 -0800  
 From: Diane Michelle  
 <dianemichellesinger@yahoo.com>  
 Subject: Re: Also a new member introducing himself

It took me a while to follow everything you said here Steph. But it made a lot of sense. What you describe is what some people call two spirited. Where one has managed to integrate the two sides of themselves more fully.

Diane Michelle

Message: 3

Date: Mon, 19 Dec 2005 05:56:11 -0800  
 From: Jivas <krazy4krsna@yahoo.com>  
 Subject: Re: Also a new member introducing himself

Dear Steph,

Wow, very inspirational and such a wonderful personal philosophy. Thank you for sharing it with us.....in fact I will use it for my morning mediation!

Namaste,  
 Neil (Preeti Kirtana)

Message: 1

Date: Wed, 21 Dec 2005 07:50:26 -0000  
 From: "jendurrserv"  
 <jendurrserv@yahoo.com>  
 Subject: Thanks for the replies

Thank you, Diane Michelle and Neil (Jivas), for your encouraging replies. How inspiring to me to know my insights were useful for another's meditations!

Yes, Diane Michelle, the term "two spirit" does apply. I don't always regard myself as two-spirited in case this label puts me into some box, according to

someone else's definition of whatever a two spirit must be.

The term that best captures my experience of spiritually motivated gender transcendence is "transspirit" -- that's with two Ss. At a profound spiritually deep level I intuitively and quite compulsively transcend any temporal division that could hinder the development of my full human potential.

It is out of this "transspiritual" energy that I naturally resist any attempt to be placed into some conventional box that would be too small for my emerging spirit. The dominant culture's gender box is definitely too small for all the gracious energy I continue to encounter.

I have noticed in my spiritual development that the first stage is a counterdependent shift from whatever is imposed as the limiting norm. After freely encountering the conventional opposite and then finding ways to integrate the two into a new depth of wholeness, I find the next stage is a gravitation towards bridging the divide by transcending any barrier that polarized it into a divide in the first place.

My masculinity is countered by my femininity. Then these become melded into my androgyny. My Christian roots become countered by flirtations with agnosticism. Then these polarized views become melded into my irreligious spirituality.

For me, you see, it's about moving way beyond "reference points" like gender norms and religious affiliation, as I encounter a depth of existence that isn't dependent upon any reference or label ascribed to it. This is how I experience my transcendence of gender, and how I am a spiritually focused person. Can anyone relate?

Message: 1

Date: Wed, 21 Dec 2005 17:18:42 -0800  
 From: Diane Michelle  
 <dianemichellesinger@yahoo.com>  
 Subject: Re: Thanks for the replies

You're welcome.

I was using the term of two spirited as I've understood it to be. If that isn't an accurate description of you I apologize and defer to however you choose to define yourself. Smile.

In fact I like your term very much. Not sure if it applies to me yet.

I understand all you're saying here and it makes sense. I am not certain how it applies if @ all to me since I find my alleged religious affiliation being shoved down my throat by a family member who insists because she is my mother that makes me Jewish. Yet she only insists on "Being Jewish" during certain holidays. Like now she wreathes the entire house with Happy Hanukkah banners.

I'm saying all this because I'm trying to figure out my own spiritual path. It

appears you have figured it out for yourself. Thanks for sharing that information because maybe there is an answer for me in what you've done. Not necessarily my answer understand.

I can relate very well to what you are saying. Just working on how if in any way I can apply these ideas to my own path.

Diane Michelle

Message: 1

Date: Tue, 27 Dec 2005 01:30:03 -0000  
 From: "jendurserv"  
 <jendurserv@yahoo.com>  
 Subject: Stretching beyond limiting  
 reference points, like gender and  
 ethnicity

The term "two spirit" fits me like an old glove. Worn in some spots, but often still useful. Especially when its familiarity can take me where the newer "transspirit" term in its newness cannot. Hence, apology not necessary...but thanks for being considerate.

"Native American" and "two spirit" are to me mere reference points. Stepping stones along the journey of awareness. When they hinder greater awareness of human possibilities, which push themselves to the fore with little thought of labels, I find these stepping stones turning into stumbling blocks.

I can relate to the holiday squeeze on ethnicity. I wanted to infuse more of

my Native traditions into my family's Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations, such as the Ghost Supper tradition and giveaway tradition. But they are set in their ways, and who am I to change them?

I have come to appreciate how my spirituality that transcends the gender divide also transcends my ethnic divide. As my femininity yearns for expression to counter the dominance of socialized masculinity, my Native identity counters the dominance of acculturated jaagnaash (White man) culture.

As I allow these spiritual energies to flow through me, I find my spirit breaking free from any felt urgency to identify with either side. Intuitively I find my spirit - like the eagle or hawk - rising higher and higher above these categorical conventions below. My spirit soars over these barriers that others find so meaningful for their existence. My existence, at a deep spiritual level, needs to embrace "connection" beyond any identity or affiliation that could divide.

That is where I experience my transgender soul. There wells up within me this inexplicable energy. It empowers me to stretch beyond the more limiting segments of gender as a reference point. And in that freedom from familiar but stagnant reference points I encounter a deeper communion and connection with the untapped potential of humanity.

I suspect everyone who is awakened to their spiritual journey in this life will

experience, at least at some level, this questioning of old familiar patterns and reference points that no longer serve. My "transspirituality" simply propels me to stretch further and broader and deeper than most. My spirit outgrew the temporal shell of "gender" and "ethnicity."

This, of course, becomes disconcerting to those who are heavily dependent upon these referent points. Including myself at a time I thought these reference points were the sacrosanct norm, and without subscribing to them my personal security could rightly be threatened.

Isn't this the crux of the issue? Existing so deeply at a spiritual level that I must transcend gender to be fully alive, while needing the comfort and support from loved ones who feel they need these references to gender norms to remain firm. But in my spiritual development I finally turned a corner. My attitude to my loved ones is now this: "You need my comfort and support more than I need yours, since I am not the one whose spirit is being tossed around by polarizing norms. I don't suffer the tensions you take for granted as I enjoy a spiritual freedom you could only envy."

Perhaps there is some useful insight in this for you, Diane Michelle. Or for anyone whose spirit may be touched by this fresh perspective. We are truly a gifted lot, aren't we?

Message: 1

Date: Mon, 02 Jan 2006 10:10:24 -0000

From: "jendurrserv"

<jendurrserv@yahoo.com>

Subject: A Native perspective, "two-spirit" or otherwise

Being Native provides me a useful perspective to my gender transcendent spiritual experience. It helps me see the cyclic side of nature, of my transgender nature.

As I moved from East (direction of innocent beginnings, among other things) to South (direction of community and group values, among other things) in my vulnerable childhood, I naturally acclimated to the expectations of being masculine according to the cultural dictates of my male anatomy. As long as I "fitted in" (at least on the outside) I could count on communal security. Without such security to a vulnerable young kid, not much else matters.

Then as I moved West (direction of going inward and seeing self apart from social dictates, among other things) in my adolescence I discovered this overwhelming urge to be feminine. This clashed with my felt need for the security I counted on, when thinking I was adequately fitting in. West is often like that in nature's cycle: one foot in exploring individuality while the other foot stuck in group thinking.

By adulthood I transitioned North (direction of individual liberty, responsibility, epiphany, wisdom, etc.) with a realization I must face and embrace my femininity if I was ever going to have any chance for healthy relating with anyone. The alternative



seemed a life of unacceptable tyranny. I had to be free, I had to accept responsibility for being who I am.

This renewed self-understanding empowered me to reenter my relationships with greater interpersonal integrity. Now I could integrate more of who I honestly am into how I relate to others, and insist others relate more deeply with me. Or choose to not allow my personhood be violated again by unreasonable expectations of gender conformity.

Inevitably I had to make some compromises along the way. I slipped back into the comfort of my security zones. I played the masculine game to please my loved ones, or just to "stay out of trouble." And this inevitably propelled me to another West phase in my cyclic journey.

In one of these cycles I went from counteracting ascribed masculinity (South) to an opposite ideal of femininity (West) only to settle into an androgynous mix of gender energies (North) in the epiphany of who I am. The freedom to "crossdress" soon felt like feminine trappings that didn't fully express all of who I am, much as my masculine trappings didn't tap into all of who I potentially am. What about a freedom not to dress up at all?

Out of this cyclic journey I continued to find my spirit compelled to transcend any cultural polarity that (implicitly or explicitly) hindered the maturing of my human potential. To take sides with "females" or "conservatives" or "Natives" felt like I was expected to force my burgeoning

spirit to fit neatly into one category against another. "All is connected," the elders teach, and indeed all is. And I am a part of this web of life. It makes little sense to me to assert one strand in this web over another, for all have equal importance in the final equation.

This is no mere intellectual exercise for me. In fact, I wasted much energy early in life fighting this yearning. Then came that epiphany several years ago with the insightful vision of being a "transspirit." Or call it "two-spirit," if that makes more sense to you.

Any label that intuitively feels too limiting to my emerging human spiritual potential easily triggers my West phase. It mysteriously counters with whatever is the missing opposite. At least until both can be blended into the inner connection I always feel. And through this experience serve as a bridge to all those suffering under the unbearable weight of society's many polarizations. Especially those that are spiritually damaging, like a rigid form of the gender binarism.

This is how I experience my transgendered spirituality. This is how my gender journey unfolds, with spiritual depth and divinely creative purpose. Because from a Native paradigm, all energies serve some natural purpose, some insistent need. I suspect that on some level this captures the underlying purpose behind many transfolk's transcendence of gender norms. Does any of this speak to your spirit and help express your own experience?

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## So I tried another Yahoo group

After I stopped receiving replies to my shared ideas I tried another Yahoo group. This one is called tg-spirit. My sole entry was in response to the moderator's invitation to new members to introduce ourselves. Again, no response. As a transgender Christian group, perhaps their focus was too narrow for my insights. Or perhaps my 'honesty' created some cold feet.

Greetings All!

I am Steph, a male-bodied androgyne of Native descent. Two-spirit? Perhaps. In integrating my Native identity with my Caucasian identity, and my indigenous spirituality with my evangelical spirituality, I am discovering the wonderful depth and beauty to my gender-transcendent experience. The term "transspirit" fits me much better.

I find I am compelled, by spiritual energies beyond my control, to transcend almost any rigid cultural barrier hindering my growing potential. I have come to realize this is why I am compelled to transcend the gender binarism. My femininity counterbalances my masculinity, directing my spirit toward a greater fullness of human depth and spirituality.

I have been blessed with a gift to be intuitively pulled toward meaningful balance. Not only am I compelled to transcend any rigid gender divide, I am compelled to transcend any barrier between my Native ethnicity and my Caucasian ethnicity, between my earth-centric spirituality and my ethereal spirituality, and even between my conservative heritage and my liberal heritage. Something deep within my

soul leads me to integrate and conciliate these temporal polarities.

Another temporal polarity my "transspirituality" guides me to transcend is the culturally constructed polarity between "guilt" and "innocence." Thirteen years ago, when I first came to terms with my "gender issues", I felt a "calling" to reach out to transgender inmates. Perhaps all this wonderful insight that has blessed me could shine a ray of hope in their doubly-oppressed lives. Consequently, from reaching out to one trans exfelon, I was for a while named among these souls. (The details of this story can be found in a past issue of Tapestry, number 97.)

Out of this sense of mission I discovered other spiritually focused transfolk in the American gulag system. This includes those beautiful souls who have become unjustly incarcerated, often because of the prejudicial portrayal of their transgender "lifestyle." Rather than turning into jaded cynics, these gender-transcendent souls are cultivating a depth of spirituality not typical of us out here with the easy life. Their thoughts on how to integrate their spiritual roots with their gender experience amidst impossible odds are truly inspiring.

Others thought so as well. Amanda Armstrong, a student at Swarthmore who is now working towards her Masters degree in Chicago, started a "Trans Religious Dialogue" among these amazing grrrrls. This informal dialogue evolved into a newsletter format, called Trans Spirituality. I serve as its editor and our first issue was released about a month ago. So far the reviews have been positive.

We are seeking grant money, or even advertisers, to help support our effort. We have a cover price, but in this age of fast and easy information over the Internet – like this site – a cover price just doesn't seem commercially feasible. Why purchase

a subscription when similar material is available online for free? I know of some publications that are completely supported by ads to make the publication free upon request, and I'd like to learn from these.

Mostly I want to keep focus on the spiritual dimension of this awesome transgender experience. And provide to those without access to the Internet, like my beloved kin in chains, an avenue for sharing our spiritual journeys. And perchance create opportunity for others to be blessed by their insights into transgender spirituality. Thank you for sharing yours.

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## What about our own Yahoo group?

For those not familiar with Yahoo groups, there is more than this kind of dialoguing you read above. This exchange of emails is the bulk of it, but there is also a place to post documents, share photos, and for links. Through these links it becomes easier to learn about other similar sites available.

Between now and June 1<sup>st</sup> I aim to start a Yahoo group for this zine. It's free, paid for by respectfully placed ads. I aim to request the groups I have joined to cross-link with one another's group site.

I plan to call it T-S\_TRD. I feel it's safe to assume such a unique name hasn't already been taken.

As submissions come in I could post them almost immediately, and see if others wish to respond. Then publish these exchanges in the pages of *Trans Spirituality*. Maybe even send individual replies.

To make this work I will set up proxy email accounts. If this is a problem then please let me know by June 1<sup>st</sup>. I have already started transcribing the Opening Statements, to post them online. Is everyone on board with this idea? Write and share your thoughts.

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# TRANS SPIRITUALITY

## BACK PAGE

Thanks for all the positive feedback to the first issue. This labor of love was for you and through you. I appreciate your prayers, as we join together in this journey that transcends gender barriers. Gender fences so defensive that I swear I can see them topped with Constantine wire!

Thank you, Mandy, for all your support – financial and otherwise. Mandy and I have agreed we will seek ad revenue as a way of improving our fiscal wellness. Later we may look into grant writing for resources.

Book vendors are likely to have a vested interest in advertising to our readership. They will likely seek some assurances that we are a worthy investment for their limited advertising dollars. So I am asking each reader to fill out the enclosed survey and send it back to me. The sooner I have these surveys the sooner I can put together a package to pitch to booksellers this potential source for sales revenue, and operating resources for us. Thanks.  
*Live true!*

*Steph*

NOTE: Deadline for submissions to next issue is May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006.