



Jo Clifford, a man living as a woman, reinterprets Jesus as a transgender in "The Gospel according to the Queen of Heaven." The play, which has been performed in front of small audiences since 2009, is receiving renewed attention after Northern Ireland's assembly vetoed a measure that would have allowed same-sex marriage in the country.

Transgender Jesus on stage in Belfast play

A play depicting Jesus Christ as a transgender will appear at the Outburst Queer Arts Festival in

Belfast, Northern Ireland, [BBC News has reported](#).

In "[The Gospel According to the Queen of Heaven](#)," Jo Clifford portrays Jesus coming back to the world in the form of a transgendered woman, or a man who has chosen to live as a woman, and preaching to those who are prejudiced toward gay, lesbian and transgender people.

"She pitches a sermon and tells a few very familiar gospel stories," Clifford told the BBC. "She has a communion, shares bread and wine with the audience, which is really a gesture of solidarity in the face of death —and she gives a blessing."

Clifford, who wrote the play and describes himself (or herself) as a "practicing Christian," told the news agency the play is a "very important, intimate show" and normally opposed by people who haven't seen it.

The play has flown under the radar for several years, being performed in small venues but occasionally serving as a catalyst for protest. In one instance in Glasgow in 2009, protestors

outnumbered those attending the play 10-to-1. In 2014, it was performed at the [Edinburgh Fringe Festival](#), the world's largest arts festival.

The play isn't the first to challenge the church's traditional understanding of human sexuality or even of Jesus. "[Southern Baptist Sissies](#)" depicted what its writers perceived as the backward stance of America's largest non-Catholic denomination on the issue of homosexuality, and "[Corpus Christi](#)" featured Jesus and his disciples as gay men in a modern Texas town.

Like those plays, the writer of "The Gospel According to the Queen of Heaven" believes people will prejudge the play, but should not.

"Obviously, being a transgender woman myself it concerns me very greatly that religious people so often use Christianity as a weapon to attack us and justify the prejudices against us," Clifford said. "I wanted to see if we could move away from that and make people think again."

Clifford said some people called the play blasphemous, but did so because they didn't know anything about the play and assumed it would be offensive to the church. He said,

however, no offense to the church is intended in the play because he doesn't *intend* for it to be offensive or blasphemous.

"I simply want to assert very strongly, as strongly as I can that Jesus of the gospels would not in any way wish to attack or denigrate people like myself," Clifford said.

According to Clifford, the play is now more important than ever since members of Northern Ireland's national assembly passed over a motion to enact same-sex marriage in the country last week. Northern Ireland, because of its contentious history of warfare between Catholics and Protestants, has a [complex legislative process](#).

Even if a measure passes in the assembly (as the same-sex marriage proposal did), it can be vetoed if it does not obtain broad community support (as the same-sex marriage proposal was).

"I think it's very important to get across the message that Jesus of the gospels would not condone or want to promote prejudice and discrimination against anybody and to try to convey a message of compassion and love and

understanding of everybody," Clifford said. "No matter what their belief, no matter what their gender, orientation or sexuality."

A YouTube [video](#) promoting the play begins with Clifford on camera and his reinterpreted version of the Lord's Prayer, complete with images of lesbians kissing, people protesting same-sex marriage, and nuclear destruction:

"Our Mother, who art on earth, blessed is your name;

Your joy be here on earth, as it is in heaven;

Give us this day our daily kisses;

Forgive us our stupidity as we forgive those whose stupidity is done to us.

Lead us not into self-righteousness or rage, and save us from destruction and negativity,

For yours is the queendom, the beauty, and they joy, forever and ever. Amen."

In another [video](#), Clifford describes the play as a "work of devotion" meant to [remind people](#) of what Jesus was "really like."

"He was talking to the victims of persecution, to the victims of prejudice and he would speak to them in a very accepting way, as one human being to another. That's how he was continually throughout the gospels. I think it's important to remind people that's what he was really like. He wasn't the nasty, prejudiced, judgmental, self-righteous person you might tend to assume if you watch the behavior of a lot of these fundamentalists – so called Christian – groups," he said.

Armagh Cathedrals Combine to Sponsor Lecture

On Tuesday 24th November, the Armagh Cathedrals Partnership will host a lecture by Dr Johnston McMaster: "Still up for the Challenge? Reconciliation in a Crisis Society". The lecture will begin at 8.00 p.m. in the Synod Hall of St Patrick's Cathedral, off Cathedral Road.

Dr McMaster commented, "Seventeen years on from the hope-filled Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland is still a long way from being a reconciled society. Things have changed for the better, but we remain a society limping from one crisis to another. There is a political inability to deal with



the past and with sectarianism, both failures preventing the future. There is no vision of a common good. Faith communities are an integral part of these struggles and indeed failures.”

If people of faith are still up for the challenge of reconciliation, he continues, “It means re-imagining and re-thinking reconciliation as well as renewing our vision and engagement. In the context of a crisis society, this lecture will explore the centrality of social justice to the Judeo-

Christian vision of reconciliation.” It will be followed by an opportunity for discussion.

A minister of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Dr McMaster is a Senior Research Writer and Educator with the Ethical and Shared Remembering Project, 1912–1922, through the Junction, Derry–Londonderry. For sixteen years he was Director of the Education for Reconciliation Programme of the Irish School of Ecumenics in Northern Ireland and Border Counties. He remains as an Adjunct Assistant Professor with the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin.

Looking forward to the event, Fr Peter McAnenly, said, “I look forward to hearing Johnston speak again. He has done extensive work on promoting reconciliation and peace building over the years. He reminds us that the work of reconciliation is a relationship–centric process and there must be trust built between sides for reconciliation to occur.”

Dean Gregory Dunstan said, “From a profoundly Christian perspective, Dr McMaster offers a penetrating diagnosis of our inability to recognize

‘the things of our peace’. We expect a challenging evening.”

For further information, please contact Armagh Parish Office, Tel. 028 3752 2813 or Armagh Public Library, Tel. 028 3752 3142.

Social media becoming ‘harsh and dehumanising’ for Catholics - warning

Archbishop Eamon Martin has warned that social media is becoming a “harsh and dehumanising” environment for Catholics.

Noting that “more and more journalists, members of the Church and other people with a public profile, have had to stop using social media as they have become victims of vitriol and abuse”, the Archbishop of Armagh said it was a “shame that aggressive behaviour and offensive language have contributed towards social media becoming a harsh and dehumanising environment for some”.

“The sins of bearing false witness, defamation, detraction and calumny are no less grave just

because they are committed behind the anonymity of a computer screen. They still destroy the dignity of another human person. When such negative communications emanate from sources purporting to be Catholic or Christian they are particularly reprehensible,” he said.

Addressing the 40th anniversary conference of the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference recently, Archbishop Eamon also praised and encouraged the work of “committed Catholics” who chose a career in communications.

“I am greatly encouraged that more and more committed Catholics are choosing to develop their particular charisms in communications as presenters, commentators, writers and digital missionaries for the sake of the Gospel and the good of the Church.

“We need to be able to affirm one another, nourish these initiatives, not be afraid or too controlling or possessive of the task of proclaiming the Good News – the Spirit is doing new things and we should not stifle the Spirit’s work,” he said.

Noting that that many people “prefer to present bad news about the Church”, the Primate of All-Ireland said it was “uplifting to increasingly come across examples in media of the beautiful, edifying and spiritually inspiring aspects of the Church, its inspiring contribution to peace, reconciliation, charity and justice – all of which reflect the beauty and goodness of God”.

Speaking at the same conference, Jesuit Fr Thomas Casey said that “we all know that technology has given bullies a much wider platform through online name-calling and we know this can emotionally destroy children and teenagers”.

Words could “cause irreparable damage,” the St Patrick’s College, Maynooth philosophy lecturer said, adding that people needed “to give less air time to words that trivialise our lives, that shrink our very selves”.

Institution of rector for Kinsale

On Wednesday, 11th November - the Feast of St Martin of Tours - the Reverend Peter Rutherford was instituted as Rector of the Kinsale Union of Parishes in the Diocese of Cork. The Service was held in the ancient Church of St Multose,



At the Institution in St Multose Church, Kinsale were (l-r) the Reverend Alastair Graham (Rector of Mullingar), Dr Janet Rutherford, the Reverend David Compton (Deacon), the Reverend Peter Rutherford (new Rector of Kinsale), the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton (Bishop of Cork), the Reverend Elaine Murray (Bishop's Chaplain), and the Venerable Adrian Wilkinson (Archdeacon of Cork).

Kinsale which was built in 1190. The Bishop of Cork, the Right Reverend Dr Paul Colton, presided and welcomed a large congregation of parishioners, people from the local community, public and eceumnical representatives, as well as parishioners who had travelled from Meath

and Kildare. The preacher was the Reverend Alastair Graham, Rector of Mullingar.

Analysis: Divestment of Catholic schools remains insignificant

At DCU in September 2006 Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said “the fostering of plurality of educational patronage is something desirable and welcome in [Ireland](#) today and could bring benefit to all”.

Patsy McGarry writes in The Irish Times - He observed that pluralism in religious belief had entered a new chapter: “In this new reality, the school must become a primary focus for fostering a climate of knowledge about various religions and about dialogue and mutual respect among different religious traditions.”

He has reiterated both views in the nine years since, but brother bishops and others in church authority remain curiously unmoved.

In its June 2012 report the Forum on Patronage recommended development of Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics programmes for primary schools. Such



Archbishop Diarmuid Martin: ‘I think some of the, what I would call, educational establishment in the Catholic Church are dragging their feet.’

programmes should not be a replacement for faith formation, it said.

On October 15th last it was claimed this proposed ERB programme was designed to banish expressions of faith from the classroom. In an [Iona Institute](#) talk Rev Prof [Eamon Conway](#), head of theology and religious studies at [Mary Immaculate](#) College of Education in [Limerick](#), described the programme as the imposition of “an inherently secularist approach to the study of faiths” which seeks “to banish specific expressions of religious conviction”.

He found it “bizarre” that a faith-based school would have to offer “what is essentially a secularist understanding of religious faith”.

It is not unreasonable to wonder if Fr Conway was among those [Archbishop Martin](#) thought of yesterday when he said: “I think some of the, what I would call, educational establishment in the [Catholic Church](#) are dragging their feet.”

The Archbishop’s impatience is not limited to those within the Church – last April he spoke of how pluralism in patronage had run up against opposition at local level, including from local political representatives, including some from the [Labour](#) Party,

To date just one Catholic school has been divested to a non-religious patron. In March last year a deal was agreed with the [Edmund Rice Schools](#) Trust, which owns the former [Christian Brothers](#) school at Basin Lane, Dublin, to lease it to the Department of Education for 10 years for use by [Educate Together](#). But it is already in trouble.

Last August it emerged the lease contains conditions which limit the school’s ability to

expand and which may threaten its viability. The Church has also surrendered Burren national school in [Castlebar](#). It closed over 20 years ago and requires substantial refurbishment.

“Enthusiasm” is hardly the word that comes to mind.

Tyrone Clergy in the Van of Refugee Relief Response

Two neighbouring County Tyrone clergymen are heading off to France this weekend with a vanload of relief aid for a refugee camp in the French port of Calais.

The Rector of Urney, Rev Mark Greenstreet, and the Rev Mark Lennox, Bishop’s Curate-in-charge in Strabane, will be taking with them supplies donated by parishioners from churches throughout the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe.

Rev Greenstreet says they’ve been inundated with donations since they issued their appeal for aid three weeks ago: “People have been so generous in their response. We’ve been contacted by people from the Church of Ireland,



obviously, but by members of other churches as well, from right across the community.

“The refugee crisis has touched many in our community but some people were unsure what practical help they could offer to help ease the refugees’ plight. Our initiative offers a way of getting the right kind of supplies directly to those people who desperately need them.”

The two ministers contacted humanitarian organisations on the ground in Calais to find out which items were needed most urgently.

Rev Lennox says they were surprised at what they discovered: “One of the things they’re crying out for is pairs of socks. They told us they have

lots of other clothes but are desperately in need of pairs of socks – especially with the onset of winter and new refugee families arriving all the time. We’ve also been asked to bring blankets, sleeping bags, children’s educational books and non-perishable food items.”

Originally the clergymen planned to transport their cargo in a box-trailer but a local business, Cita Furniture in Sion Mills, has now offered them the use of a van.

“We’ve all been moved by the images we’ve seen on television of refugees fleeing war in Syria and elsewhere,” Rev Lennox said, “and by the pictures of despair in makeshift camps. Mark and I felt compelled to respond to the crisis. In James 2: 14–17, we – as Christians – are called to action: ‘What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.’”

The two clergy will leave Strabane on Saturday morning to catch the ferry to France and will share the driving during their four day trip.

Scottish Anglican and Presbyterian Churches warn that UK Government welfare reform will increase poverty

The Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland have warned that the UK Government's Welfare Reform and Work Bill will fail to get people into work and will instead increase poverty.

In a report published the Churches highlight how the Bill threatens to undermine the founding principle of the welfare state, namely that the amount people receive in benefits should be sufficient to meet their basic needs. It argues that the Bill will break the link between what a family needs and the amount of support they can receive.

The Rt Rev Dr John Armes, Bishop of Edinburgh said "This report makes very clear that UK

Government benefit cuts are not working. Far from encouraging adults back to work they threaten instead the health and well-being of families with children. This is a moral issue and it undermines the principle on which the Welfare State was founded, namely that people should have sufficient benefits to meet their basic needs. I would appeal to the UK government to pay attention to this report and to reconsider its policies in the light of the evidence that their cuts are causing the weakest and poorest in our nation undue suffering.”

The Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, Convener of the Church of Scotland’s Church and Society Council said: “Scotland’s Poverty Truth Commission works on the principle of involving people who have direct experience of living with the daily struggle against poverty in contributing to the policy-making process. The UK Government need to hear from the people who will be affected, such as the 46% of families who have been affected by the Benefit Cap who have found themselves in rent arrears.”

The report, ‘*Enough: Our responsibility to meet families’ needs*’, was published as a partnership between a number of UK Churches. As well as

the Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church, the report is backed by the Methodist Church, Quakers in Britain, the United Reformed Church and charity Church Action on Poverty.

Dr Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church and author of the report said: “As Christians we believe all people are made in God’s image. We do not believe that we should ever deliberately deprive a person, a family, a child of enough to survive, to thrive or to fulfil their God-given potential. We are asking that the welfare state holds to its founding principles, and seeks to provide enough so that every child can have the best chance in life.”

People can find out how different groups will be affected by the Welfare Reform and Work Bill online [here](#). The Churches are asking people to pray, to read and share the report and write to their MPs and MSPs. Additional resources for ‘*Enough: Our responsibility to meet families’ needs*’ are available from <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/enough-resources/>

Media digest

Guard/Exp

A majority of British Muslims say they have witnessed discrimination against followers of the Islamic faith and that a climate of hate is being driven by politicians and media, a study has found. Six out of 10 Muslims in Britain surveyed by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) said they had seen Islamophobia directed at someone else, up from four in 10 when the survey was first conducted in 2010. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, is quoted.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/11/majority-of-british-muslims-have-witnessed-islamophobia-study>
<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/618662/Attacks-Muslims-on-rise-report-Islamic-Human-Rights-Commission>

Tel

The government's plans to extend Sunday trading laws have received a boost after the Liberal Democrats said they would support the plans. Eight LibDem MPs, led by leader Tim Farron, were expected to agree to back the Prime Minister's plans to allow local councils to let shops open for longer on Sundays. The news means that the vote on whether to relax the rules – which Mr Cameron postponed from next week in the face of opposition from 20 of his own MPs and the SNP - could be very close.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/retailandconsumer/11989622/Vote-on-Sunday-trading-hours-on-knife-edge-as-LibDems-MPs-back-David-Cameron-relaxation-plans.html>

BBC (History Extra)

In pictures - treasures from England's parish churches

<http://www.historyextra.com/article/medieval/pictures-treasures-englands-parish-churches>

BT

This weekend marks the 75th anniversary of Nazi Germany's air raid on Coventry. For 11 hours on the night of November 14, 1940 tons of high explosive bombs were dropped on the Midlands city. The city's Cathedral was destroyed in the raid. Events marking the date culminate in a peace and reconciliation concert at Coventry Cathedral on Saturday, with a memorial service the following day.

<http://home.bt.com/news/uk-news/75th-anniversary-of-coventry-blitz-to-be-honoured-11364015963283>

BBC

A couple from Taunton have celebrated a combined 150 years of ringing bells at their church in the town. Margaret and Dennis Whatmore, who met during World War Two and married in 1947, said their role was a "never-ending challenge". Dennis, 92, started ringing when he was 13 while Margaret, who turns 92 on Friday, only started learning when she was 19.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-34789816>

BBC

One of the world's smallest consecrated chapels has closed for "major structural work". The Little Chapel, in Les Vauxbelets, St Andrew, Guernsey, measures 16ft (5m) by 9ft (3m) and will be shut for "a number of months". Last year, cracks started appearing in the structure, which were blamed on subsidence. The length

of closure is unclear in what is described as the "first phase" of a "restoration project".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-guernsey-34721901>

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