

A Theology Of Gender And Gender Identity

(A report from the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission.)

Terms of reference

The Standing Committee –

(a) received the following report –

“In April 2016 the Social Issues Committee agreed to establish a subcommittee to address issues related to gender and gender identity. The subcommittee has now met, and recognised the need for position paper outlining a theology of gender and gender identity, to inform its work. Following consultation with the chair of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission it is agreed the Doctrine Commission is best placed to provide such a paper. Given the desire for the Gender subcommittee to report to synod in 2017, the Doctrine Commission has suggested its own report be provided to Standing Committee in June 2017.”, and

(b) requested the Diocesan Doctrine Commission *prepare a position paper providing a Theology of Gender and Gender Identity, which includes issues related to Gender Dysphoria*, for the Standing Committee meeting June 2017.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic rise in social awareness and public discussion of the phenomenon of transgenderism. This has been driven by two distinct developments. The first is an increased appreciation of the fact that some people experience a profound sense of gender incongruence (that is, a mismatch between their biological sex and their psychological sense of gender identity). This heightened appreciation has provoked considerable discussion about the appropriate clinical and pastoral response to such a condition, particularly in the light of the possibilities occasioned by medical and surgical developments. Second, the therapeutic discussion has become intertwined with an ideological discussion about the nature and reality of gender itself. The development of Gender Theory (explained below), which is far from ideologically neutral, has given further impetus to this discussion.
- 1.2. However, there are real (and often unacknowledged) points of tension between these two discussions. For example, most forms of contemporary Gender Theory hold (i) that gender is not binary, but occurs on a broad spectrum and (ii) that gender is not fixed, but fluid. Many of those who identify as transgender, however, are convinced that there are only two genders, but that, in their case, their gender does not match their biological sex. Notwithstanding these inconsistencies, the theory that gender is non-binary and changeable is being promoted as both the explanation of and appropriate response to gender incongruence. It is important, therefore, to disentangle these two discussions. This will help us to make a wise and compassionate response to those who experience genuine gender incongruence, without having to embrace the claims of contemporary Gender Theory.
- 1.3. Christian engagement with these issues draws on the biblical doctrines of creation, including its corruption and disorder as a result of the human fall into sin, redemption through Christ and the eschatological hope of renewal and restoration. It takes seriously the value of each human being as one created in the image of God, and the biblical imperatives to gentleness and love, and the need to live by faith in Christ in humble obedience to the word of God. Our starting point as believers is the goodness and benevolence of God, which underpins the truthfulness and life-nourishing character of his word. Our desire is to exhibit the compassion of Christ to a needy and broken world, and so to take seriously the deeply personal and often painful gender identity struggles experienced by some fellow human beings.

2. Key terms and their meanings

- 2.1. Before turning to the relevant biblical material, it will be helpful to define a number of key terms that are an essential part of this discussion.
- 2.2. *Biological sex*: This refers to the physical or physiological characteristics that help us differentiate between what is male and what is female: chromosomes, hormones, gonads, genitals, and secondary sex characteristics – e.g., body shape, voice pitch and hair distribution. Biological sex is often simply referred to as sex.

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- 2.3. *Gender*: Historically, the terms sex and gender have often been used interchangeably. Even today drawing a distinction between them is not universal. Where a distinction is made, however, gender is “often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions between the sexes.”¹ As such, the term usually encompasses three aspects: gender identity, gender expression and gender roles.
- 2.4. *Gender identity*: This refers to the way individuals perceive themselves and wish to name and identify themselves. When a person’s subjective gender identity conforms to their objective biological sex, as is the case for most people, they may be referred to *cisgender* (cis = on this side of).² When there is a clash, however, then they are commonly referred to as *transgender* (trans = on the other side of). See further paragraph 2.9. below.
- 2.5. *Gender expression*: This refers to the psychological and social aspects of how masculinity and femininity are presented in things like dress and demeanour, social roles and conventions and other cultural gender norms. These vary from culture to culture, if not from person to person.
- 2.6. *Gender roles*: This refers to the commonly accepted expectations of maleness or femaleness, including social and behavioural expectations. Some roles (e.g., who cooks the meals or who manages the finances) vary from person to person, household to household, or culture to culture, others are biologically determined (e.g., pregnancy and breastfeeding).
- 2.7. *Gender bending*: This refers to the intentional crossing, bending or blending of accepted gender roles or behaviours, perhaps by adopting the dress, mannerisms or behaviours of the alternative binary gender (often referred to as transvestitism), or through the attempt to obscure one’s gender and to appear as either asexual, agender, pansexual, omnigender or androgynous.
- 2.8. *Gender dysphoria*: This is the latest diagnostic term for the distress experienced by those whose psychological or emotional gender identity differs from their biological sex.³ It replaces the former term, *Gender Identity Disorder*, which saw the mismatch itself as a psychiatric disorder.⁴ Now, however, it is only the distress that is (usually) caused by the mismatch that is regarded as a disorder, not the mismatch itself. For this reason we will usually use the language of gender incongruence to describe the experience of mismatch throughout this report.
- 2.9. *Intersex*: This is a general term that covers a range of rare ‘disorders of sex development’ (or ‘disorders of sex differentiation’) where there is some biological ambiguity in a person’s genitalia or gonads or, more rarely still, in their chromosomes. Except in very rare instances, a person’s biological sex can be known from their DNA. Because intersex conditions are medically identifiable deviations from the sexual binary norm they are not regarded as constituting a third sex. Because they are biologically (rather than psychologically) based, some intersex people do not wish to be associated with the LGBTQ movement.⁵
- 2.10. *Transgender*: This is an umbrella term for people who are born either male or female, but whose gender identity differs from their biological sex (to varying degrees), and who want to express the gender with which they identify through cross-dressing, and/or cross-hormone therapy, and/or ‘sex reassignment surgery’. The term transsexual is sometimes used interchangeably with transgender, and sometimes used only of those who seek medical assistance to transition. Because of its breadth, the transgender umbrella also includes those who identify as bigender, pangender, omnigender, gender fluid, gender diverse or agender.
- 2.11. *Heteronormativity*: This term communicates the three ideas: (i) that biological sex is either male or female (sexual binarism), (ii) that sex and gender are meant to go together (cisheteronormativity), and (iii) that only sexual orientation toward and sexual relations with a member of the opposite sex is normative. It is used by the LGBTQ movement as a pejorative term.

3. Biblical and Theological Considerations

- 3.1. We turn now to explore the way in which the Bible’s teaching speaks to the issues raised by current gender ideology (in general) and to the phenomenon of gender incongruence (in particular).

¹ J. A. Simpson & E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

² This term cisgender emerged in the 1990s as part of the development of transgender ideology. Although, in itself, it is a neutral descriptor, it is often employed in order to normalise transgender experience; i.e., to convey the idea that it is just as natural for some to be transgender as it is for others to be cisgender.

³ See, for example, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition* (Washington, DC/London: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), pp. 451-459 (usually referred to as DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association.

⁴ DSM-4 (1994).

⁵ For this reason, we will use the acronym LGBTQ, rather than LGBTIQ, throughout this report.

Creation and its Implications

- 3.2. The basic, binary and sexually dimorphic nature of humanity is revealed in Genesis 1 and then repeated (after humanity's Fall) in Genesis 5.⁶

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man (Heb. 'adam) in our image ..."

²⁷ So God created man (Heb. 'adam) in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male (Heb. *zakhar*) and female (Heb. *neqevah*) he created them. (Gen 1:26-27)

¹ ... When God created man (Heb. 'adam), he made him in the likeness of God. ² Male (Heb. *zakhar*) and female (Heb. *neqevah*) he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man (Heb. 'adam) when they were created. (Gen 5:1b-2)

The implication of these texts is clear: God did not create a third sex. This point is underlined by Jesus in answer to the Pharisees' question about divorce.

He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female." (Matt 19:4; cf. Mark 10:6)

The biblical account of creation thus indicates that God has created each human being as either male or female. We are given no encouragement to consider male and female as two extremes at either end of a broad continuum, or to consider those with an intersex condition as intended from the beginning as a third sex.⁷

- 3.3. This maleness and femaleness of humanity is portrayed in Genesis 1-2 not just as a physical characteristic of the bodies of the man and the woman, but as part of their relational nature as beings made in the image and likeness of God. The man's sexed identity is intimately connected to the woman who is flesh of his flesh (Gen 2:23), and to whom he holds fast (2:24) and with whom he shares the responsibility of ruling the world under God. Likewise, the woman's sexed identity and purpose as God's image-bearer is intimately connected to the man, out of whom she is taken (2:23), and whom she helps in their mutual task of dominion (1:28; 2:20-21). The man-ness of Adam makes no sense without the woman-ness of Eve as his counterpart, and vice versa. Each is defined in distinction from but in relation to the other.
- 3.4. The binary reality of human sexuality revealed in Genesis 1 is both emphasised and developed in Genesis 2. Here we move from humanity being described in terms of the adjectival nouns 'male' (Heb. *zakhar*) and 'female' (Heb. *neqevah*) – which are not unique to humans but also apply to animals (e.g., Gen 6:19) – to the nouns 'man/husband' (Heb. *ish*) and 'woman/wife' (Heb. *ishshah*), as these are applied to Adam and Eve.

²⁴ Therefore a man (Heb. *ish*) shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife (Heb. *ishshah*), and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man (Heb. 'adam) and his wife (Heb. *ishshah*) were both naked and were not ashamed. (Gen 2:24-25)

The implication of this, contrary to current gender theory, is that biological sex is inseparable from both gender identity and gender roles. Human males grow into men (and potentially husbands and fathers) and human females grow into women (and potentially wives and mothers). Indeed such 'heteronormativity' is what makes human marriage, human family and human flourishing possible. This is, once again, confirmed by Jesus, as he brings Genesis 1 and 2 into the closest possible connection.

⁶ But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." ⁷ "Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh." (Mark 10:6-8a)

The implication is once again clear: men and woman are not two poles at either end of a gender spectrum. Gender, like sex and because it is an extension of sex, is binary. There is thus no space in biblical anthropology – either before or after the Fall – for additional genders.

⁶ All Bible references are taken from the English Standard Version, Permanent Text Edition© (2016), unless otherwise indicated.

⁷ In fact, the eunuchs of Scripture are all presented as male (as is indicated by the use of masculine nouns, verbs and pronouns), but are presumably unable to function sexually or reproductively (Esth 2:3, 14-15; Isa 56:3), either because of a birth defect or due to human interference. In other words, Scripture resists diluting the sex/gender binary, even though some do not fit neatly into it.

The Fall and its Implications

- 3.5. That is not to say that human sexuality and gender identity are straightforward in a post-Fall world. Clearly this is not so for everyone and, to some degree, not for anyone. The Bible has much to say about the effects of the Fall on every aspect of our humanity, including our sexual expression and gender identity. Furthermore, sin and death have impacted every part of human existence and the whole created order has been subjected to frustration. Consequently, various forms of disease, disorder and disability are part of human experience. In other words, things go wrong with us not only relationally and behaviourally, but psychologically (with respect to our minds) and physiologically (with respect to our bodies and even to the level of our chromosomes).
- 3.6. One of the many ways that the Bible acknowledges the reality of physiological disability is by introducing us to the category of the eunuch – a term which generally referred to a castrated or otherwise impotent male. Indeed, in Matthew 19, following his discussion of the nature of marriage and the legitimate grounds for divorce, Jesus distinguishes between three types of eunuchs: two literal and one metaphorical or spiritual.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. (Matt 19:12)

Jesus' first two categories were, no doubt, informed by the Jewish distinction between "eunuchs of the sun" – i.e., those who have been eunuch from birth – and "eunuchs of man" – whether made so by accident or design. The first of these categories, most likely, would have included conditions that today would be regarded as disorders of sex development. However, as we've already noted, Scripture nowhere presents eunuchs as a third sex.⁸

- 3.7. But what about those whose bodily sex is unambiguous, and yet who claim to have been born in the wrong body; e.g., a male who is convinced he is a woman or a female who is convinced she is a man? How should we think about such a condition?⁹ To answer this question we need to consider what Scripture reveals about the relationship between the physical (or corporeal) and nonphysical (or incorporeal) aspects of the human person. Scripture displays a range of ways of speaking about both the corporeal and incorporeal aspects of human existence.¹⁰ What is consistently taught in both testaments is a dichotomous or dipartite view.¹¹ That is, human beings consist of body/flesh and soul/spirit. Furthermore, although the body perishes at death, and so can be separated from the soul, this is a consequence of sin and, therefore, an 'unnatural disruption'. God's ultimate purpose, therefore, is for body and soul to be reunited in resurrection at the last judgment, so that our eternal experience (whether it be of salvation or damnation) will be a 'psychosomatic' one. Therefore, Jesus can speak in the following way:

And do not fear those who kill the body (Gk. *sōma*) but cannot kill the soul (Gk. *psychē*).
Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body (Gk. *psychē kai sōma*) in hell.
(Matt 10:28)

- 3.8. At the same time, however, the biblical authors view the human person as an integrated whole. This means that "[b]iological processes are not just functions of the body as distinct from the soul or spirit, and mental and spiritual capacities are not seated exclusively in the soul or spirit. All capacities and functions belong to the human being as a whole, a fleshly-spiritual totality."¹² Otherwise put, Scripture

⁸ It is also important to note that certain intersex conditions may contribute to gender dysphoria in the person with the condition. For this reason DSM-5 distinguishes between gender dysphoria without a disorder of sex development (p. 455) and gender dysphoria with a disorder of sex development (p. 456).

⁹ It has been suggested that a different kind of physiological ambiguity may lie behind this condition: that it is the result of brain-body mismatch. However, the scientific evidence supportive of such a theory is negligible at best. As Drs Lawrence S. Mayer and Paul R. McHugh write: "the current studies on associations between brain structure and transgender identity are small, methodologically limited, inconclusive, and sometimes contradictory. Even if they were more methodologically reliable, they would be insufficient to demonstrate that brain structure is a cause, rather than an effect, of the gender-identity behaviour." See Lawrence S Mayer and Paul R. McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences," *The New Atlantis* 50 (Fall 2016), p. 104: http://www.thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20160819_TNA50SexualityandGender.pdf.

¹⁰ For example, "Inner man", 'spirit', 'soul', 'mind', 'heart', – all do duty for the incorporeal part of man and different functions thereof. 'Outer man', 'flesh', 'body', 'members', 'mouth', 'face', and several metaphors do similar duty for the corporeal part of man." Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 156.

¹¹ There are two texts that suggest a distinction between 'soul' and 'spirit' (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12), which some see as evidence for a trichotomous or tripartite view. In whatever way these texts may be best understood, they do not disturb the general, two-fold distinction between the inner and outer person.

¹² John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 78.

understands “human beings holistically as single entities which are psychosomatic unities.”¹³ Scripture, therefore, presents us with an anthropological ‘both-and’, a ‘dualistic holism’: i.e., an ontological duality (a distinct body and soul) within a functional holism (a single integrated person).

- 3.9. The soul is the soul of the body and the body is the body of the soul. As King David writes: “For you formed *my* inward parts; you knitted *me* together in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13). The sex of the body, therefore, both determines and reveals the gender of the person. Christian ethicist, Oliver O’Donovan teases out the implications of this fact with both clarity and compassion.

The sex into which we have been born (assuming that it is physiologically unambiguous) is given to us to be welcomed as a gift of God. The task of psychological maturity – for it is a moral task, and not merely an event which may or may not transpire – involves accepting this gift and learning to love it, even though we may have to acknowledge that it does not come to us without problems. Our task is to discern the possibilities for personal relationship which are given to us with this biological sex, and to seek to develop them in accordance with our individual vocations ... Responsibility in sexual development implies a responsibility to nature – to the ordered good of the bodily form which we have been given. And that implies that we must make the necessary distinction between the good of the bodily form as such and the various problems that it poses to us personally in our individual experience. This is a comment that applies not only to this very striking and unusually distressing problem [i.e., gender incongruence], but to a whole range of other sexual problems too.¹⁴

So notwithstanding the fact that all kinds of things can and do go wrong with us, both physiologically and psychologically, biblical anthropology leaves no room for the idea that one can *actually be* a man trapped in a woman’s body or a woman trapped in a man’s body. That may well be a person’s subjective feeling, but it is not an objective fact.

- 3.10. The Bible is also unambiguous in its condemnation of a number of behaviours that best fall under the rubric of ‘gender bending’. The first of these behaviours is that of cross-dressing, which is directly prohibited in Deuteronomy 22:5.

A woman (Heb. *ishshah*) shall not wear a man’s (Heb. *geber*) garment, nor shall a man (Heb. *geber*) put on a woman’s (Heb. *ishshah*) cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination (Heb. *to’evah*) to the LORD your God.

There can be little doubt that this text condemns cross-dressing in the strongest terms. This is clear from the use of the Hebrew word *to’evah*, which is a word applied to any act that is “excluded by its very nature” or is “dangerous or sinister.”¹⁵ It is thus the word applied elsewhere to homosexual intercourse (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and various idolatrous practices (Deut 7:5; 13:14). But why should cross-dressing be seen in such a light and condemned in such terms? Some commentators have assumed a link with either homosexuality or pagan religious practices. This is possible, but there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest as much.¹⁶ More likely, “[t]he immediate design of this prohibition was not to prevent licentiousness, or to oppose idolatrous practices ... but to maintain the sanctity of that distinction of the sexes which was established by the creation of man and woman, and in relation to which Israel was not to sin.”¹⁷ Therefore, while care is needed in applying old covenant commands to our situation under the new covenant, the abiding ethical principle behind Deuteronomy 22:5 is straightforward: “this injunction seeks to preserve the order built into creation, specifically the fundamental distinction between male and female.”¹⁸

- 3.11. Moving to the New Testament, the second of the behaviours that Scripture condemns is sexual effeminacy; that is, a man playing the part of a woman (by being the ‘receiver’) in homosexual intercourse. Those who engage in such a practice are included in Paul’s vice list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Oliver O’Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), pp. 28-29.

¹⁵ Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 1429.

¹⁶ See the arguments of P.J. Harland, “Menswear and Womenswear: A Study of Deuteronomy 22:5,” *ExpTim* 110 (1998), pp. 74-75.

¹⁷ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), p. 945.

¹⁸ Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), p. 512. The issues of intention and effect also require consideration. That is, it may be possible to engage in cross-dressing for (say) the purpose of entertainment (e.g., Dame Edna) without the intention or effect of confusing either self or others or blurring established boundaries. But there are risks. While intentions can be innocuous, effects are much harder to gauge and impossible to control.

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate (Gk. *malakoi*), nor homosexuals (Gk. *arsenokoitai*), ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (NRSV)

Paul's assessment of homosexual behaviour derives from the absolute prohibitions found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and so (like Deut 22:5) is ultimately grounded in the creation theology of Genesis 1-3.¹⁹ His use of the two distinct terms highlighted above (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) reveals that he is censuring all who willingly play either the passive or the active roles in homosexual acts.²⁰ His reference to the *malakos* ("soft man"), therefore, is aimed at those who actively feminize themselves by (and for the purposes of) playing a passive homosexual role.

- 3.12. The third of the behaviours that the Bible opposes is gender ambiguity; that is, the attempt to blur the lines between man and woman by one's gender expression. This is Paul's chief concern in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and why he challenges his readers accordingly.

⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved ... ¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. (1 Cor 11:4-5, 13-15, NIV)

While there is a number of complexities in the passage in which these verses appear, what is clear is that Paul desires men and women to both maintain and celebrate the gender distinctions that reflect our God-given sex, and not take steps to either deny or diminish them.²¹ This is why he "expresses no less disquiet (probably indeed more) about men whose style is effeminate with possible hints of a quasihomosexual blurring of male gender than about women who likewise reject the use of signals of respectable and respected gender distinctiveness."²²

- 3.13. Both the Bible's creation theology and its post-Fall prohibitions against the abuse and misuse of our God-given sex and gender lead to the same conclusion: all human beings have been created as either male or female, and it is God's will for us to embrace his good gift even though this can be complex in a sin-cursed world. We can further conclude that however best we categorise the painful experience of gender incongruence, from a biblical point of view, it involves a significant misperception of created reality.
- 3.14. However, it is important to emphasise that this does not mean that sufferers of gender incongruence are necessarily culpable for their condition. The critical factor, morally speaking, is how one responds to such a condition. Unlike wilful gender bending or deliberate gender erasing (which, as we've seen, are clearly prohibited in Scripture), the experience of gender incongruence would appear to be a largely non-volitional affliction and, to that extent, a condition for which sufferers are not culpable.²³ Consequently, our first response to those who struggle with their gender identity ought to be compassion and care, not condemnation or censure.
- 3.15. The more difficult question is what a person suffering from gender dysphoria should do to resolve it. The biblical teaching we have reviewed suggests that attempts to obliterate, disguise or live at odds with one's God-given sex/gender are contrary to God's will and against human good. Consequently, any attempt to do so, no matter how well intentioned, is unlikely to bring the lasting relief that sufferers are seeking and may bring them even greater distress.²⁴

¹⁹ See Gordon J. Wenham, "The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality," *ExpTim* 102 (1990-91), pp. 359-63.

²⁰ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 241.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 503.

²² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 805.

²³ We say "largely" because, as Robert Gagnon notes, it's impossible to disentangle the "complex interplay of nature, nurture, environment, and choices. Incremental choices made in response to impulses may strengthen the same impulses." See R.J. Gagnon, "How Should Christians Respond to the Transgender Phenomenon." *First Things* (October 16, 2015): <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/10/how-should-christians-respond-to-the-transgender-phenomenon>.

²⁴ Not surprisingly, the instance of 'sex-change regret' is disturbingly high (and little publicised) and, tragically, the experience of undergoing 'gender transition' seems to do little to address the high attempted-suicide rate of transgender people (over 40%). See, for example, Cecilia Dhejne, Paul Lichtenstein, Marcus Boman, Anna L. V. Johansson, Niklas Långström, and Mikael Landén, "Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden," *PLoS One* 6:2 (22 February, 2011): <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3043071>.

Redemption and its Implications

- 3.16. First, at the heart of the Christian gospel is the stunning claim that all who confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead are not only justified from sin, but brought to new birth by the Holy Spirit and given a new identity as sons and daughters of the living God. “Therefore,” writes Paul, “if anyone is in Christ, he [or she] is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). This vital, spiritual union is necessarily determinative of a whole new self-understanding. As Paul writes elsewhere: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20a). In short, no Christian is what they once were (1 Cor 6:11); we have come to fullness in him in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily (Col 2:9-10).
- 3.17. Second, this new life entails a new lifestyle. Those in Christ are called to “no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). This does not mean the removal of all temptations, trials and afflictions (not, at least, in this age), but it does mean there is a new power at work in us (that of the Holy Spirit) to help us “put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:9-10). This call to mortification and vivification has profound implications for what we do with and to our bodies, for the Christian’s body is now a temple of the Holy Spirit. “You are not your own,” says Paul, “for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).
- 3.18. Third, among the vices of the “old self” that all believers are called to discard are covetousness (Col 3:5) and falsehood (Eph 4:25). These sins are particularly pertinent to the subject at hand. For many who struggle with gender identity issues are sorely tempted to desire a body other than the one they have been given. That is covetousness. Likewise, the aim of those who seek to transition gender is to “pass” as the opposite sex to what they actually are. This is falsehood. Such vices must be “put off.”²⁵ They are the opposites of contentment and truthfulness, and undermine godly relationships. Consequently, faithfulness to Christ cannot be separated from how a person with gender incongruence manages their condition.²⁶ Robert Gagnon puts it well: “while redemption is unmerited, an active pursuit of a ‘transgender’ life would be at odds with ... a claim to ‘faithfulness’ to Christ.”²⁷
- 3.19. Fourth, as there are vices to be “put off,” so there are virtues that believers are called to “put on.” Four are of especial relevance to our subject: endurance, patience, joy and thanksgiving. The development of such Christ-like characteristics is repeatedly encouraged in Scripture. But these four are brought together in Colossians 1:11-12, where the apostle Paul speaks of believers

¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Endurance and patience are vital for sufferers of gender incongruence, particularly for those whose cross-gender identification is strong and persistent. The distress caused by such a condition can be very painful, and the force of the temptation to alleviate it in destructive ways very real. The battle to be faithful can, therefore, be exhausting. However, resistance and obedience are possible, and much prayer is needed that strength be given to this end. But, more than that, joy and thanksgiving are also possible – if not for the affliction itself, for the sufficiency of God’s grace (2 Cor 12:9) and the fruit that suffering inevitably bears under the wise and sovereign hand of God (Rom 5:3-5; Jas 1:2-4).

- 3.20. Fifth, such a battle should never be fought alone. This is one of the reasons why the risen Christ has given his followers the gift of Christian brothers and sisters – not only that we might keep each other accountable, but that we might bear one another’s burdens. So Paul writes as follows to the Galatians.

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1-2, NIV)

²⁵ We appreciate that the person who is convinced they are ‘in the wrong body’ may wish to argue that their longing for a different body, or their attempts to disguise or change their body, are driven by a desire to present their ‘true selves’. Our argument is that the body reveals the ‘true self’.

²⁶ Contra Mark A. Yarhouse, “Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon,” *Christianity Today* (June 8, 2015): <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/july-august/understanding-transgender-gender-dysphoria.html?share=7K2biduOkWQzqfy+4ihDhypi09ikaJk3&paging=off>.

²⁷ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Gender Dysphoria and ‘Practical Application’: A Rejoinder to Mark Yarhouse” (August 28, 2016): <http://www.robagnon.net/Yarhouse%20Rejoinder.htm>.

This text raises the important question: What counts as a “sin” and what counts as a “burden”? In our view, the experience of gender incongruence itself falls in the latter category (burden). Consequently, “there is a need for the church to be able to cope with the disclosure of gender incongruence among those who experience it and have the courage to share what they are going through.”²⁸ Nevertheless, from a biblical standpoint, attempts to alleviate gender dysphoria by gender transitioning (whether by social transitioning, cross-dressing, cross-hormone therapy or ‘sex change’ surgery) fall into the category of “sin.”²⁹

- 3.21. Sixth, what will gentle restoration look like when such sin takes place? Here is where a range of factors will need to be taken into account: e.g., whether the person is a believer or a seeker, how old they are, whether they are spiritually mature or immature, the severity of the dysphoria, what steps they’ve taken, and whether they have other physical and/or mental health issues. Consequently, the nature and timing of restoration, and the kind of care and counsel required, will vary from person to person. Nevertheless, in light of the teaching of Scripture, it is clear that all forms of cross-gender identification are contrary to God’s will and the good of sufferers. Therefore, the goal of restoration will be to work toward an acceptance of one’s bodily sex as a true signifier of one’s gender.
- 3.22. Finally, alongside our concern for the welfare of the person suffering gender dysphoria, there is another important factor to be considered in our response. That is, the impact of the decisions we take or the strategies we adopt upon the church community. What message is being sent by a church that effectively condones that which Scripture condemns? What effect will this have on other members of the body – particularly those who are vulnerable and impressionable or struggling in other areas of life? Paul’s concern – “a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough” (1 Cor 5:6) – is relevant here. That said, needlessly imposing rigid gender stereotypes is not helpful either. Provided believers are operating within accepted biblical norms and cultural expectations for gender roles and gender expression, not all men and women need to look, dress or act in precisely the same way.

The Age to Come and its Implications

- 3.23. The final piece of scriptural teaching relevant to our question has to do with what is revealed about the nature of our resurrection bodies. Admittedly, there is much we cannot know on this score (1 Cor 15:35-36). Nevertheless, in broad terms, the Bible affirms a principle of both continuity and transformation (1 Cor 15:42-44). That is, following the pattern of Jesus’ own resurrection, it is *this earthly body* that will be raised, but with *different qualities and capacities*. As Paul says, Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3:21).
- 3.24. Curiously, the prospect of transformation has led some to speculate about the possibility of our being raised as either androgynous or monosexual or asexual beings. Given that our bodies are sexed in this world, and that the risen Jesus remains a man (Acts 17:31), it would require a very clear statement of Scripture to create the expectation that we will be raised as something other than eternally sexed (and therefore gendered) beings. Certainly, when read in context Galatians 3:28 teaches no such thing, nor does 1 Corinthians 6:13-15.³⁰ Far from suggesting that sex distinctions disappear in Christ, the first of these passages simply makes the point that one’s sex is irrelevant to one’s standing in Christ (Gal 3:26-27). The second is affirming not the destruction of gender, but that our bodies will be raised just as the Lord’s body was raised (1 Cor 6:14). In being raised, we will, of course, be changed (1 Cor 15:51-52); but not changed from men or women into something else. Rather we will be changed from mortal to immortal, perishable to imperishable men and women (1 Cor 15:53-54).
- 3.25. The one passage that some have thought teaches that we will be raised as asexual is Matthew 22:30 (and parallels), where Jesus says: “For in the resurrection neither do they marry nor are they given in marriage, but are like the angels.” But while this passage clearly affirms that marriage belongs only to this age, it says nothing about the elimination of human sex distinctions. In fact, Jesus’ choice of words implies quite the opposite: as Augustine saw, “neither do they marry” is a reference to males and “nor are they given in marriage” is a reference to females. In other words, “[f]ar from saying that

²⁸ Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015), p. 151.

²⁹ Yarhouse, therefore, is not to be followed when he suggests that some believers “may benefit from space to find ways to identify with aspects of the opposite sex, as a way to manage extreme discomfort.” Mark A. Yarhouse, “Understanding the Transgender Phenomenon,” *Christianity Today* (June 8, 2015): <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/july-august/understanding-transgender-gender-dysphoria.html?paging=off>.

³⁰ See Richard Hove, “Does Galatians 3:28 Negate Gender-Specific Roles?” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), pp. 105-143. Daniel R. Heimbach, “The Unchangeable Difference: Eternally Fixed Sexual Identity for an Age of Plastic Sexuality,” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), p. 285.

there will be no distinctions of gender in the new creation, Jesus said in essence that those who are male in heaven will not take a wife, nor will those who are female be given in marriage.”³¹ Human marriage will have fulfilled its purpose.

- 3.26. The glorious prospect of bodily resurrection as eternally sexed/gendered beings has two important implications. First, whatever disappointments and disabilities we may have to deal with in this life, it matters what we do with and to the bodies God has given us. In fact, even though Christians should be willing to spend and be spent in the cause of our Master, we are nonetheless to love our bodies. As Paul says, “no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church” (Eph 5:29). What we do with our bodies is significant. The tragedy of self-rejection and self-mutilation needs to be seen in this light. This may well be an act of desperation but it is also an assault upon the body and so ultimately sinful. The intensity of the struggle and the temptation to think about ourselves in ways other than those God encourages and directs in his word does not convey legitimacy upon such responses. Instead we are called upon to take comfort in the Saviour who knows our weaknesses and is able not only to sympathise with them but to provide “grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).
- 3.27. Second, in the resurrection on the last day every form of disease and disorder, sickness and sadness will be healed and banished once and for all (Rev 21:4). In fact, so wonderful will be the glory revealed both to us and in us that the sufferings of this present time will not be worth comparing with it (Rom 8:18). This is good news for all of God’s people, but particularly for those whose gender incongruence proves irresolvable in this life. Christians have a real hope that will not disappoint us. This is why we are called to wait for it with patience (Rom 8:25), fixing our eyes not on what is seen and transient but on what is unseen and eternal (2 Cor 4:18).

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. How, then, should we think about gender incongruence and gender identity struggles where there is no disorder of sex development involved? In light of the Bible’s teaching, and in the absence of any certain biological cause, gender dysphoria (and the incongruence lying behind it) is best regarded as a psychiatric disorder. This is why it appears, and how it is classified, in the most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.³² In other words, despite what is sometimes claimed, there is no reason to believe that a person can have either the brain or the soul of one sex and the body of the other. Rather, it is a psychological pathology and, as such, one of the tragic effects of the Fall.
- 4.2. Such clarity may do little, in and of itself, to alleviate the distress of those who suffer from gender incongruence. This is why responding compassionately and constructively to such felt experiences remains a paramount concern of the Christian community. However, the conclusions we have reached do lay some important foundations upon which to build a biblically informed and medically responsible pastoral and therapeutic approach. It likewise provides a helpful interpretive grid through which we can evaluate current Gender Theory and make sense of the various social, political and ideological changes going on around us. For not only are the basic claims of Gender Theory false, but the goal of sex change is unrealisable.³³
- 4.3. What, then, is the call of the gospel to those who are gender non-conforming? First, like all who are weary and burdened, they are to come to Jesus as they are. This means that in our evangelism we must not let the temporary overshadow the eternal. The greatest need of those who experience gender dysphoria or who identify as transgender or have undergone sex reassignment procedures is not for their identity issues to be resolved (as wonderful as that would be), or their attempts at transitioning to be reversed (which may not be possible), but to be reconciled to God and adopted as his beloved children. In other words, like the rest of us, transsexuals, the transgendered and the gender dysphoric need the gospel of Jesus Christ. For every human being has been created through and for Jesus Christ (Col 1:16), and will therefore be restless in heart unless and until they find their rest in him.³⁴ But rest is precisely what Jesus promises to all who come to him in faith (Matt 11:28) – irrespective of their past sins or present afflictions. This is the hope of the gospel: that true life, lasting peace and eternal comfort can be found in Jesus Christ.

³¹ See Mark David Walton, “What We Shall Be: A Look at Gender and the New Creation,” *JBMW* 9:1 (Spring 2004), p. 19.

³² The weakness of DSM-5 is that it is only the dysphoria or distress that is seen as the clinical problem, not the actual gender incongruence. However, there are equally good reasons for regarding gender incongruence itself (irrespective of the distress it may or may not cause) as a mental disorder. This was the strength of the category of ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ in DSM-4.

³³ As Paul McHugh writes: “Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men ... In that lies their problematic future.” See “Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme”, *The Public Discourse* (June 10, 2015): <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/06/15145>.

³⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* I.1.1.

- 4.4. Second, while we are all invited to come to Jesus as we are, he is not content to leave any of us as we are. His goal is to restore us into his own image and teach us to discern and do the will of God (Rom 12:2). As we have seen, this will necessarily entail living, as far as is possible, in conformity with our God-given sex. For those who have gone down the path of transitioning, this will mean ceasing cross-hormone treatment,³⁵ cross-dressing and other forms of cross-gender identification. Some surgical steps and some of the effects of cross-hormone therapy may, of course, be irreversible. If so, the person may need to see themselves akin to one type of biblical eunuch; that is, as one wounded physically by past sin, but awaiting wholeness in the resurrection.³⁶ Whatever the case, sensitive pastoral care and strong congregational support will be essential for anyone who, in obedience to Christ, is seeking to de-transition.
- 4.5. Finally, how should Christians respond to the transgender tsunami that is currently sweeping the western world and impacting increasing numbers of churches, schools and homes? Our first response should always be genuine compassion towards those who experience the brokenness of the world in the form of gender incongruence or who are victims of the confusion created by current gender theory. Compassion and truth, however, ought not to be pitted against one another. We will need to speak truthfully to those who are struggling in this area and misled by Gender Theory. If we truly love our neighbours, we will also refuse to withdraw from discussion in the public square. We will, therefore, not only pray fervently but, where possible, publicly challenge the claims of Gender Theory. We will also advocate for a more responsible and coherent therapeutic approach to the treatment of gender incongruence and for truly 'safer' school education programs and policies that benefit and protect *all* children. We need to do all these things in a way that cannot itself be labelled simply 'ideological,' but rather arises from a profound humility before God and his word and a heartfelt concern for the welfare of fellow sinners and fellow sufferers.

For and on behalf of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

M D THOMPSON
Chairman

31 July 2017

³⁵ Albeit under appropriate medical supervision.

³⁶ Russell Moore, "Joan or John? My Answer: Part Two," *Russell Moore* (May 26, 2009): <http://www.russellmoore.com/2009/05/26/joan-or-john-my-answer-part-two>.