

Contradictions between Power, Sex and Gender in the Christian Church¹

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12 April 2017

Dear Sirs,

I refer to Clifford Longley's article in The Tablet of the 8th April 2017 titled: "*Human sexuality remains a mystery, with many surprises still to come*"⁴. In this article Clifford considers gender and sexual identities and he comments that the origins of these are not well understood. However the Christian Church for many centuries has condemned all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour "*as acts of grave depravity that choose the sexual act to the gift of life, which do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity and under no circumstances can they be approved*"⁵. The danger in making such a judgement is that the principles which give rise to it can be tested by science⁶. Currently a great majority of professional institutions in the Western world regard gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as being naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development, and which cannot be changed by the individual concerned or by the actions of others in subsequent life⁷.

I would like to draw your attention to the results of a new neurophysiological and psychological investigation which is summarised in Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*Disagreements between Science and Theology in the Understanding of Gender and Sexually Variant Identities and Behaviour*". This introduction is available on the internet at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/230P-Disagreement.pdf>: and onward references are given to more detailed work⁸. It is established that the search for both gender and sexual identities are identity driven. Therefore behaviour and reward are not the focus. As a consequence a moral duality must exist whereby gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities in ways that conform to the highest moral standards of their own societies should be highly regarded while those who misuse these relationships ought to be very severely condemned for their acts⁹. The conclusions of this investigation confirm the experiential scientific results that are supported by the great majority of the professional institutions. Therefore both the existence of the moral duality which is identified in this analysis and the results

¹ This is a subsequently edited, annotated and extended version of the letter submitted to the Tablet on the 12th April 2017. The original letter is available at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/230P-OriginalLettertoTablet.pdf>

² Personal Biography <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

³ Available online at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/230P-LettertoTablet.pdf>

⁴ Longley, Clifford. (2017): "*Human sexuality remains a mystery, with many surprises still to come*": The Tablet 8 April 2017.

<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/columnists/2/9733/human-sexuality-remains-a-mystery-with-many-surprises-still-to-come>

⁵ Extracted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 2357. The Second Edition English Translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church with corrections promulgated by Pope John Paul II on 8 September 1997

⁶ For a discussion on the Catholic viewpoint see: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice*", at:

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf> .

⁷ This is the position taken for example by the British Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and parallel United Kingdom organisations. Equivalent positions are taken by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. Other international mental health organizations, including the World Health Organization have followed. Against this is set minority conservative organisations such as the American College of Paediatricians and the might of the Christian Church. Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church*": at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

⁸ This article refers to an extended programme of neurophysiological and psychological research. For more detailed descriptions, (with references to sources) see: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf> also Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-InfluencesPersonality.pdf>; Gilchrist, S. (2013): "*Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf> and Gilchrist, S. (2015): "*Personality Development and Gender: Why We Should Re-think the Process*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/209P-RethinkPaperFull.pdf> (copy under revision available on the web). Also Gilchrist, S. (2013): "*A Reassessment of the Traditional Christian Teaching on Homosexuality, Transsexuality and on Gender and Sexual Variation Using a New Neurophysiological and Psychological Approach*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/207P-ReassessmentPsychologyExtended.pdf>

⁹ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life*", at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf> .

Gilchrist, S. (2017): "*Contradictions*"

First Issued: 12 April 2017. Last update: 18 April 2017.

Draft: Printed: 20/04/2017 17:43

Access via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

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of the scientific evidence, directly contradict the traditional teaching of the Christian Church¹⁰. An additional concern arises because the traditional teaching of the Christian Churches medically misdiagnoses these conditions, and great harm has been done because the wrong methods have been applied¹¹.

It is important to note that gender and sexual identities form independently of each other. Therefore as wide a range of sexual orientations and identities are found within the gender variant communities as those which exist in the population at large. Thus being transgender is no indication of sexual identity or orientation, and the reverse also applies¹². However the same types of formation processes are involved in both cases. In many respects gender and sexually variant people share similar issues in terms of their relationships with society and that is why they can be considered together in this account.

A second part of this investigation determines how and why these contradictions have occurred. An extended theological and historical study has been conducted which uses the results of this scientific analysis to examine the development of Christianity from the standpoint of the surrounding societies, and not just from the evidence presented by the Christian Church¹³. Because the moral duality is inherent to gender and sexually variant behaviour, its characteristics must be present in all societies and at all times. This must also be observed in societies where same-sex relationships could be expressed. Rather than sexual propriety being determined on a gendered basis moral judgements in antiquity were made by separating the noble pursuit of love from the carnal abuse of sex. The relationships between power and sex in these grossly gender and socially unequal societies are also examined, and it is shown that it was the abuses of power which gave permission for extreme abuses of sex. Most notably in male same-sex acts. All of these features would have been known Jesus, John, Paul, the other disciples, and also in the cultures in which they lived.

Changing attitudes to the relationships between power and sex are shown to have played a key role in these developments. It is also demonstrated that a paradigm shift has taken place, and that this is why the contradiction occurs. The prohibitions of same-sex intercourse in Leviticus 20:13 and 18:22 are examined from both the first century Jewish perspectives and the Old Testament viewpoints, where sources such as those from Ugarit are used. It is demonstrated that the specific reason for this prohibition in Leviticus was to condemn its use in enforcing power, humiliation, domination and subjugation inside and across the different grossly gender and socially unequal societies. Contrary to present day expectations this condemnation was not primarily concerned with the denunciations of sexual abuse, temple prostitution or fertility rites¹⁴. That does not imply that there should be a reduction in moral standards. Sexual abuse is condemned in many passages in the bible and in other halachic literature. Heterosexual intercourse was permitted for *"the good of relationships"* as well as procreation. Contraception was also endorsed in some limited circumstances; however ejaculation for any other purpose was strongly condemned as *"spilling one's seed in vain"*¹⁵. These

¹⁰ Gilchrist, S. (2017): "A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church": at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

¹¹ All of the major medical organizations across the UK have very strongly condemned any attempt to try to 'cure' transgender people. In 2015 a "Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK" was issued by these health organisations. It said: "We the undersigned UK organisations wish to state that the practice of conversion therapy has no place in the modern world. It is unethical and harmful and not supported by evidence....Sexual orientations and gender identities are not mental health disorders, although exclusion, stigma and prejudice may precipitate mental health issues for any person subjected to these abuses. Anyone accessing therapeutic help should be able to do so without fear of judgement or the threat of being pressured to change a fundamental aspect of who they are" The signatories are: UK Council for Psychotherapy, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, British Psychoanalytic Council, British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, The British Psychological Society, College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists, The Association of LGBT Doctors and Dentists, The National Counselling Society, NHS Scotland, Pink Therapy, Royal College of General Practitioners, the Scottish Government and Stonewall. Available at: <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Memorandum-of-understanding-on-conversion-therapy.pdf>

¹² For an extended analysis of their formations see: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf>

¹³ For an account of the social, historical and theological studies, see the following papers: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>; Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>; Gilchrist, S. (2013): "An Unfinished Reformation": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

¹⁴ Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

¹⁵ In Chapter 38 of Genesis Onan is struck dead for "spilling his seed on the ground" Although it is coitus interruptus, some take it to be the condemnation of masturbation as well. The rabbis condemned this as the ejection of semen in vain. However this may have had more to do with Onan's refusal to obey God's command to populate the world. The general attitudes and prohibitions involved in same-sex and heterosexual intercourse are extensively discussed in: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and

criteria put strict boundaries on what was acceptable. Nevertheless the Rabbis were quite specific in citing the abuse of power as the particular reason for the prohibition in Leviticus 20:13 and 18:22¹⁶. Thus, unlike to today's understanding, the focus of this prohibition in Leviticus was on the abuse of its purpose in enforcing power and domination. It was not on the abhorrence of sexual penetration or the ecstasies of the sexual act. That interpretation also corresponds with the condemnations of Sodom and Gomorrah for "Lack of hospitality" by Jesus in the New Testament, and the misbehaviours in Jewish first century Chavruta and Rabbinic partnerships; which were condemned for "Lack of respect"¹⁷. It is also supported in the Old Testament analysis¹⁸. Significantly this means that when these abuses of power are absent, the moral judgements that are applied to same-sex intercourse should be the same as those which are applied to any other same-sex or heterosexual act of sex.

Roman society viewed sexual activity and same-sex intercourse through the prism of subjection and domination. Slaves, non-citizens and members of subject and conquered societies were particularly vulnerable to the resulting sexual abuses. However there is no evidence for these power struggles in the Letters and Epistles of the New Testament. Instead of this, Peter and Paul repeatedly emphasise the need to obey the Roman authorities and the efforts they made to ensure the respectability of Christian behaviour in conformity with the social codes that applied in the Roman world. This meant that Christianity could no longer attack these institutional power structures. However it could still attack the sexual abuses that arose from them. As a consequence the denunciations contained in the New Testament focus entirely on the abuses of sex. Christianity was virulent in its attacks. Therefore it is not surprising that, because of the intensity of these condemnations, and the subsequent criminalisation of gender and sexually variant behaviour, all awareness of the moral duality which is inherent in gender and sexually variant behaviour was lost. In a society where power and domination was enforced through same-sex intercourse, a set of doctrines which demanded the celibacy of Jesus and the virginity of John also became essential for the life of the Church¹⁹.

A paradigm shift has therefore occurred. This has moved the understanding from, what in New Testament times was the condemnation of same-sex intercourse based on denouncing the purpose of the act, into the unvarying condemnation of the same act: as something which is invariably depraved, disordered, and in pursuit of inappropriate sex. This transference was consolidated in the work of Aquinas, who was largely responsible for formulating what today is regarded as the traditional teaching of the Church on same-sex intercourse, and by extension on gender and sexually variant behaviour. For Aquinas the supremacy of the Church, which was vested in the Popes, was greater than that of Kings and Emperors. Aquinas also sought to restore the authority of the Church after the Cathar revolt which began in 1243. This revolt was partly due to repulsion at the abuses of power and sex that had been taking place within the socially dominant Church. Aquinas enforced the paradigm shift by excluding consideration of these abuses of power on sexual behaviour, by focussing his condemnations solely on the motives of sex, and by condemning all sexual behaviour outside marriage as mortal sins which are always in pursuit of lust and improper sex. The presumption that same-sex relationships attack the sanctity of marriage is also inherent in these doctrines which Aquinas developed. The sanctity of marriage is very highly valued in the teaching of Jesus, and in the Jewish tradition, yet none of the statements in the bible automatically condemn the possibility of other relationships. Neither does Jesus do this in his own teaching. As a consequence there is no equivalent condemnation to that which Aquinas imposes in the Bible itself.

This paradigm shift is shown to be the reason why the contradiction between science and theology occurs. The teaching of Jesus is examined in the light of this paradigm shift and the neurophysiological and psychological study. It is shown that no contradiction with the results of the scientific study occurs. From each of the scientific, theological and historical points of view it is demonstrated that the traditional teaching and doctrines of the Christian Church on gender and sexual variation are built on an incorrect foundation. They do

Traditions of the Christian Church: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf> and Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>

¹⁶ For discussions on temple prostitution and its relationship to fertility acts and sex, see: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "*An Unfinished Reformation*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/016B-UnfinishedReformationArticle.pdf>

¹⁷ See: Gilchrist, S. (2014): "*Christianity and Crisis: An Overview of Gender and Sexual Difference in the Early and Modern Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/017B-ChristianityAndCrisisOverview.pdf>

¹⁸ Gilchrist, S. (2015): "*Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/022B-Deuteronomy22-5.pdf>

¹⁹ The virginity of John is repeatedly emphasised in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. It is still celebrated today in the Orthodox Churches. See Gilchrist, S. (2016f): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

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First Issued: 12 April 2017. Last update: 18 April 2017.

Draft: Printed: 20/04/2017 17:43

Access via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

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not correspond with the teaching of Jesus, and they come instead from the need to gain respectability in Roman society. For as long as the Christian Church held control over the social attitudes of society, this traditional doctrine could never be challenged. Because of the changes in present day world, that control has now been broken. The de-criminalisation of homosexuality in the 1960s and the subsequent anti-discrimination legislation on a world-wide basis means that for the first time in at least 1000 years people are able to see for themselves the full range of experience in gender and sexually variant behaviour. They now have the ability to make distinctions between relationships which result from the outpouring of love and commitment, and those which only seek the gratifications of sex. They can also make their own assessment of the moral duality that exists. It is the continued refusal of the Catholic Church and the Church of England in particular to consider even the possibility of any change in their traditional doctrines on gender and sexually variant behaviour which is destroying the credibility of Christianity and the Church in the present day world.

The crucial feature that must be resolved is identified by the scientific analysis. This demonstrates that there is a fundamental contradiction between the conclusions of science and the traditional teaching of the Christian Church. The theological, historical and social analyses, at most, can only show how and why this conflict occurs, and chart ways of escape. A radical approach is taken in this investigation. It is not necessary to agree with this historical, theological and social study, however it is essential to find ways to resolve the contradiction between science and theology that occurs. This demands that there must be some changes to the traditional teaching of the Church. However the change that is needed is not one which departs from the Gospel message. It is one that returns to the Gospel texts.

This is not an analysis which demands or supports any relaxation of moral values in attitudes to gender and sex. Instead it demands that the boundary between use and abuse be changed from one that condemns all gender and sexually variant behaviour irrespective of purpose, to one that applies identical criteria of use and abuse to all heterosexual, cross-gender and same-sex sexual acts. The transformations that this demands within the gender and sexually variant communities may be for some, as great as those which are required by the Christian Church. These concerns are not just a matter of theology. All forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour, for any purpose challenges the good order of all societies in which the separation of gender roles are legally or socially enforced. Therefore the condemnation of all gender and sexually variant behaviour, regardless of purpose, places the Christian Church in a role which colludes with and gives legitimacy to the scapegoating of all gender and sexually variant people in the secular world. In many countries extreme legal penalties are applied. This scapegoating will continue as long as these doctrines are in force. There is no doubt that there was a great deal of sexual abuse in first century society, where the blatant abuses of power gave permission for extreme abuses of same-sex acts. However to condemn all gender and sexually variant behaviour for the abuses of some, is akin to saying today that every member of a minority community is a terrorist because some engage in terrorist acts. Therefore change is urgently needed. But it is not change that departs from the Gospel message. Instead of making homosexuality and every gender and sexually variant person the scapegoat for sexual abuse, it requires that the correct role for the Christian Church should be one of combatting all forms of abusive sex.

More detailed accounts of these investigations are given in the following two papers:

Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice"*:
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>.

Gilchrist, S. (2017): *"A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church"*:
<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>

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First Issued: 12 April 2017. Last update: 18 April 2017.

Draft: Printed: 20/04/2017 17:43

Access via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

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