

Transgender Liturgies: The Interactions between Science and Theology in the Life of the Church

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Recent research work into the development of personality and self-identity in early life uses a novel approach to map the transition between the internally created and inbuilt neurophysiological processes which propel early development, to the externally moderated cognitive processes which come into effect in later life. The development of atypical gender and sexual identities is used to examine how this occurs. In this research it is demonstrated that these core features are irreversibly established before the brain has developed sufficiently to enable the cognitive processes to seek behavioural rewardsⁱⁱⁱ. That means that these core features are driven by the search for identity alone. Therefore a moral duality must exist whereby transgender people and other gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities while conforming to the highest standards of their societies should be highly regarded. Those engaged in misuse may be severely condemned for their acts. That contradicts the traditional teaching of the Christian Church which condemns all such behaviour as disordered lifestyle choices that always pursue inappropriate sex. As a consequence Christian theology medically misdiagnoses these conditions: which involve creating identity: not desire or reward. Great harm has been and is still being done because the wrong methods, including "Gay Cures", are applied^{iv}.

The same viewpoint is taken by the great majority of professional medical and psychological institutions in the Western world, who currently regard both 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 life. This is the position taken for example by the British Royal College of Psychiatrists^v, the British Psychological Society and parallel United Kingdom organisations^{vi}. Equivalent positions are taken by the American Psychiatric Association^{vii} and the American Psychological Association^{viii}. 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^{ix} and the might of sections of the Christian Church.

This contradiction is one of fact and not theology since both of these disciplines presume to dictate the motives that are involved, and the management methods that should be applied. Science argues that the behaviour which results is about being able to be true to one's own identity, while the traditional Christian theology presumes these behaviours are always actions of grave depravity which are invariably driven by the desire for inappropriate sex. An extended historical and social study shows how these restricted Christian interpretations have come about^x. There have been great advances in the pastoral care offered to gender and sexually variant people in recent years: but pastoral care, however compassionate and well-meant, is not enough. In February 2017 the Church of England's "Bishops' Reflection Group on Sexuality" presented its report on: "*Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations: A Report from the House of Bishops*"^{xi}. The working party which created it identified two issues which they considered to be particularly important. First, there was little support inside the working party for changing the Church of England's teaching on marriage and sexual relationships^{xii}. Nevertheless there was a strong sense that existing resources, guidance and tone needed to be reassessed. The Bishop's report advocated compassion but no changes in the teaching of the Church^{xiii}. In a letter which was sent after the rejection of the report by the Church of England General Synod, the Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York declared that, notwithstanding this rejection, discussions should still continue according to the traditional doctrine on gender and sexual variation as "The Church of England has received it"^{xiv}.

Despite the direct material and scientific evidence of the fundamental conflict between the approaches presented by science and theology there is still the total refusal in many elements of the Christian Church to consider the possibility that there may be a flaw in the theology itself. This has enabled groups, such as the Latimer Trust^{xv} and the blog by Ian Paul^{xvi} to produce documents which may include a great deal of information about care for transgender and other gender and sexually variant people, using material which has been produced by transgender people themselves, but which also make selective use of outdated and specifically chosen scientific reports in ways that seek to prove that transgender people are prisoners of their own misconceptions; and also to affirm the correctness of the theology of the Church. The identity driven nature of early development is dismissed or ignored. Many of the documents that are used fail to recognise the existence of the internally created and inbuilt neurophysiological processes which propel early development. This means that these documents can be interpreted in ways which suit the theology of the Church^{xvii}. That destroys the objectivity essential to any scientific approach. It also treats these conditions as illnesses or infections. This must be totally condemned when it is knowingly done. This allows the Church to continue to support its traditional doctrines and condemn them as behaviours that are a falling from grace, disapproved of in Christian teaching, and a lifestyle choice.

These traditional doctrines presume that transgender people are men who desire the rewards of becoming women, and vice versa. In reality transgender people are people who want to live as themselves. That viewpoint is totally contradicted in the lived experience of gender and sexually variant people and this is responsible for the many misconceptions that occur^{xviii}. Many fight against this contradictory sense of gender identity until attrition and exhaustion gives them no other choice. After transition many merge invisibly into society in the role they adopt, having attained a sense of self-identity which is coherent and complete. In the scientific investigation earlier referred to it is demonstrated that the physiological, neurological and psychological aspects of brain development act together to form a finely tuned system in which the maximum amount of individuality, possessiveness, intelligence and inquisitiveness, together with the minimum degree of energy expenditure is generated. Typical or atypical gender identities can therefore develop and, from a statistical point of view alone it is expected that a proportion of people who have gender or sexually variant identities must be created without the requirement for any external cause. It also means that for everyone the development of their own gender identity and allegiance, atypical or not, proceeds in the same way. Therefore transgender people develop a gender allegiance which is contrary to their biological sex, but this is at least as firmly held as those for whom their gender identity and allegiance follow a normal path.

For transgender people, to be told by others that their conflicts pursue desire rather than identity; is a denial of the trauma which is endured. That is recognised in civil law^{xix}. Refusing a liturgy which gives full affirmation of the true identity not only rejects the integrity of people who are seeking such affirmation, it also reveals the failure of the Church of England to accept the advances of science, and its continued refusal to offer a full place for all who seek to follow the Gospel of Christ in the life of the Church.

Further reading:

- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Future Approaches to the Science and Theology of Gender and Sexual Variation in the Church of England and the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/232P-FutureApproaches.pdf>
- 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>
- 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. (2016): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>
- A full bibliography is also available on: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/bibliography.htm>

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ⁱ Personal biography available at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Available online at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/234P-SynodMotionTransgender.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ See "Further Reading" at the end of this document. A full account is also available on: Gilchrist, S. (2013): "Personality Development and LGB&T People: A New Approach": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/201P-PersonalityDevelopmentAndLGBTPeople.pdf>

^{iv} All of the major medical organizations across the UK have very strongly condemned any attempt to try to 'cure' gender and sexually variant 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>

^v Royal College of Psychiatrists' statement on sexual orientation http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/ps02_2014.pdf

^{vi} British Psychological Society and other organisations: Conversion Therapy: Consensus Statement.

http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/conversion_therapy_final_version.pdf

^{vii} APA Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Statement: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>

^{viii} APA Policy Statements on LGBT Concerns <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/policy/>

^{ix} American College of Paediatricians <https://www.acped.org/> : 'Transgender' Conditioning Is 'Child Abuse':

<http://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/j-matt-barber/american-college-pediatricians-transgender-conditioning-child-abuse>

^x See "Further Reading" at the end of this document". Also: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Foundations of Science, Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church": [Introduction and Index]: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/217P-FoundationsSexGender.pdf>

^{xi} Church of England (2017): "Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations. A Report from the House of Bishops": General Synod Document 2055: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/3863472/gs-2055-marriage-and-same-sex-relationships-after-the-shared-conversations-report-from-the-house-of-bishops.pdf>

^{xii} The history of refusing to consider scientific implications is documented in Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Controversy and Challenge: Issues of Gender and Sexuality in the Present Day Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/018B-ControversyAndCrisis.pdf> . Material based on this approach was made available to the Church of England for the Shared Conversations process: Gilchrist, S. (2014): "Articles Offered to The Church of England for use in its Process of Shared Discussions on LGBTI Matters": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/020B-OfferedPapersIntroduction.pdf>

but science played little or no part in these discussions. References to it are condemned as the work of "transgender activists" instead

^{xiii} It describes this as: "Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church". Clause 32 also notes that: "It would also need to be acknowledged that some deep-seated questions are likely to come to the fore in addressing these matters. In particular, issues of identity that are both controversial and profoundly personal would need to be faced..... Can the Church of England establish a consistent tone and culture when it encompasses those who hold to some sharply differing moral judgments about those choices in this case?" Clause 33 notes: "This is therefore a critical and highly challenging area for further work. Tackling it well will be crucial for everything that follows". By advocating only a teaching document and pastoral concern these issues are avoided.

^{xiv} Church of England, 2017: "Letter from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York following General Synod". See:

<https://churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/02/letter-from-the-archbishops-of-canterbury-and-york-following-general-synod.aspx>

^{xv} Davie, Martin (2015): "Transgender Liturgies: Should the Church of England develop liturgical materials to mark gender transition?" Latimer Briefing 20: <http://www.latimertrust.org/index.php/publications/briefings/276-lb20>. In this document the case for the acceptance of gender transition is made out in three representative documents by Christina Beardesley, Chris Dowd and Justin Tanis. Against this it is argued that these do not provide a convincing basis for accepting the idea at the heart of gender transition, that "someone's true self can be separated from their biological sex". The document then sets out an alternative Christian theological framework for approaching gender transition and for giving pastoral care for transgender people. It argues that liturgies which recognise the transition of transgender people should not be endorsed by the Church.

^{xvi} Paul, Ian: (2017): "What do we need to know in order to have an informed debate about transgenderism?": <https://www.psephizo.com/sexuality-2/debating-transgender/>. This document, which purports to be an objective account about scientific transgender and theological matters has been made available to General Synod Members, who will be attending the General Synod Meeting of The Church of England in York in July 2017

^{xvii} In pursuit of his argument Davies cites a number of articles including: The Evangelical Alliance, "Transsexuality", Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000. He also cites Walt Heyer: (2015), "A Transgender's Faith". This makes use of the articles by Paul McHugh. Paul McHugh is also cited in, 'Transgenderism: A Pathogenic Meme,' Public Discourse, 10 June 2015, also in Lawrence S Meyer and Paul McHugh, 'Sexuality and Gender,' The New Atlantis, No. 50, Fall 2016 at <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/number-50-fall-2016>. Further books cited include Oliver O'Donovan, "Transsexualism, Issues and Argument", Cambridge: Grove Book, 2007. Vaughan Roberts, "Transgender": The Good Book Company, 2016. And Mark Yarhouse: "Understanding Gender Dysphoria", Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015. All of these approach the issue from a Christian perspective. The article fails to note that McHugh's views have been rejected in an open letter signed by at least 600 scientists. (See: https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/lgbti/files/lgbti/publication_files/ExpertLGBTIConsensusLetter.pdf). Also the work by Money cited in this article has been discredited, not because it disproves transgender issues, but because of irregularities in the approach. Furthermore the whole thesis of the argument which is presented by Davies fails, because it presumes that the development of the true self, which includes gender identities and sexual identities, cannot be separated from biological sex. That presumption is shown in independent studies to be incorrect. These issues are more fully discussed in: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>.

For independent research on gender identity see also: <http://www.gires.org.uk/>

^{xviii} See: 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>

^{xix} Gender Recognition Act 2004. Also House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee Transgender Equality First Report of Session 2015–16 <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/390/390.pdf>