

Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church.

Susan Gilchrist¹

SuH1115h²

15 November 2017

On the 13th November 2017 the Church of England published new guidance to Church schools on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying³. Nigel Genders, the Church of England Education Officer Said *“We are equipping schools with support to ensure that they can create welcoming communities where human identity in all its forms is celebrated One in ten pupils who are transgender have received death threats. Can you imagine how that can impact on a young life? More frequent is marginalizing through social exclusion, cyberbullying, verbal and physical abuse”*⁴

The immediate response of the popular press was to ridicule and to trivialise this approach. The headline in the Sun was to say *“The skirt on the drag queen goes swish, swish, swish”*⁵. In a previous opinion article on gender neutral shop changing rooms the Daily Express⁶ it was stated that transgender people are such a tiny minority that any rights they might have should be disregarded: because the majority may be perverts who abuse this approach. Another article; published by the Daily Mail Online states *“I’m not surprised the absurd Church of England says boys can wear tiaras to school. All common sense has been lost in the gender debate”*⁷ When splashing the headline: *“Church: Let Little Boys Wear Tiaras”*, the Mail quoted a conservative Christian activist who called the new guidelines: *“unkind, unloving and lacking in compassion”*. She said: *“We are all against bullying, but the Church is using these guidelines to pursue an agenda that runs counter to the Church’s teaching.”* The article states *“schools have been told they can’t use Bible as basis for gender identification”*⁸ This secular scapegoating is not new. However it is important to note that this type of discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief.

A major feature of gender complementarity comes from the way it separates the male from the female roles. Any form of gender and sexually variant behaviour which departs from the normal expectations of that society, for any purpose, challenges this distinction. The need to seek respectability and acceptance in Roman society was considered essential if Christianity was to continue to survive and bring its Gospel message to the world. However the compromises which this demanded swapped the most radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sexuality for the

¹ Personal Biography <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² Issued 8 January 2017: This paper is available online at: Gilchrist, S. (2017): *“Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People: and its impact on the Christian Church”*: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/238P-SecularScapegoating.pdf>

³ Church of England: (2017): *“Valuing All God’s Children: Guidance for Church of England schools on challenging homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying”*: Second Edition, Autumn 2017 https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Valuing%20All%20God%27s%20Children%27s%20Report_0.pdf

⁴ Genders, Nigel: (20117): *“Why our guidance on combating bullying is part of our vision for education”*: 13 November 2017 <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/comment-and-features/why-our-guidance-combating-bullying-part-our-vision>

⁵ The Sun: Monday 13 November 2017

⁶ Daily Express 10th November 2017: *“We must stop pandering to the tiny minority that is the transgender lobby says TIM NEWARK THE news that Topshop has caved into transgender pressure and is to abandon separate men’s and women’s changing rooms is just another indication of a minority rights culture that has got way out of hand”*. <https://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/877876/Stop-pandering-to-tiny-transgender-lobby>

⁷ Daily Mail 14 November 2017: *“I’m not surprised the absurd Church of England says boys can wear tiaras to school. All common sense has been lost in the gender debate, writes A.N. WILSON”*: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-5079597/The-absurd-Church-England-says-boys-wear-tiaras.html#ixzz4yWRloWQM>

⁸ Daily Mail: 13 November 2017: See: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5075641/Let-little-boys-wear-tiaras-says-Church-England.html#ixzz4yWNdxTNw>

respectability of the Church⁹. These transformations have brought the Church to collude with the secular demands of society rather than to challenge them¹⁰. Not only has this collusion reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them: one only needs to look today at the behaviour of Daesh and Boko Haram to see how extreme this can become. The persecution and slaughter of gender and sexually variant people, not just in Christianity but in Islam, Judaism and all other religions, states and cultures which have drawn their teachings from it has been enormous. In many African countries extreme penalties against homosexual behaviour are being advocated or applied¹¹

In the United Kingdom, between 2016 and 2017 reports of transphobic hate crime have risen by 180 percent. There were only 19 prosecutions for transphobic hate crimes during this period, despite this huge rise to 582 incidents. Two transgender people have committed suicide while in custody in United Kingdom prisons. One transgender person is leaving for New Zealand because this is considered a safer place to live. Concern about the widespread nature of persecution and discrimination of transgender people has already been raised in the United Kingdom Parliament. These are just some of the issues that have been reported: Joanna Jamel, senior lecturer in criminology at London's Kingston University, told the Independent: *"There's a dark figure of unreported and unrecorded crimes and we'll never know what that true figure is"*. The nature of this secular scapegoating and persecution is not helped by those doctrines of the Christian Church which decree that sexuality and gender identity are God-given attributes and that any departure, for any purpose, from their divinely created male and female stereotypes is always a falling from grace, which pursues inappropriate sexual desires and is a grievous sin. In various States of the United States the legitimacy of the identities of all transgender people is being denied by the passing of legislation which demands that all transgender people use facilities according to the gender identity assigned to them at birth, regardless of the gender identity they possess, and irrespective of any physical transformations they have made. Not only is this being supported by groups of protestant evangelical Christians, it is also being supported by senior Prelates in the Roman Catholic Church. President Trump is trying to reinstate the ban on transgender people serving in the military. With the support of various Christian and Church groups, and under his watch, other legal protections are being rescinded. Providing appropriate care for transgender children is also being rejected for the same reasons.

The ideas behind the Christian doctrine that transgender and sexual identities are the result of lifestyle choices which are promoted by the pursuit of inappropriate desires are rejected by a worldwide consensus of modern science. In the Western world, the great majority of professional medical and psychological institutions currently regard both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health provides the consensus view¹². That is the position taken for

⁹ See: 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>

¹⁰ See for example: 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>

¹¹ This is not just a theological point of view. In all of today's interpretations little account is taken of contrast between the privileges of power exerted in dominant societies and the oppression of submission in conquered ones: both in terms of the cultural differences that are established, and in the use and abuse of sex. Evidence of the high degree of trauma and distress that these power conflicts create is present today: it is seen with the Taliban, Islamic State and Boko Haram. In history it extends from the Christian practice of slavery in the Americas to the Empires of the ancient world. No examination of Christian theology and its attitudes to all forms of gender and sexually variant behaviour can be complete without taking full account of the relationships between power and sex. Sadly, and in part because of this absence, many in Christianity, Judaism and Islam have colluded with the discrimination that has occurred.

¹² The World Professional Association for Transgender Health represents trained professionals who have been working in this area for many decades, from all over the world. The latest WPATH Identity Recognition Statement is as follows: *The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) recognizes that, for optimal physical and mental health, persons must be able to freely express their gender identity, whether or not that identity conforms to the expectations of others. WPATH further recognizes the right of all*

example by the British Royal College of Psychiatrists, the British Psychological Society and parallel United Kingdom organisations¹³. Equivalent positions are taken by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. International mental health organizations, including the World Health Organization have followed. All of these organisations are signatories to the WPATH standards. This is also supported by the lived experience of transgender people. The reasons behind their overriding compulsions to seek gender reassignment are usually not to become a man or a woman, instead it is to be able to be true to their own selves in their everyday lives. Some may willingly engage in sex work, others can be forced into it because their economic circumstances give them no alternative. Because it fulfils a search for identity and not behaviour, as wide a range of moral attitudes, loyalties and commitments are found amongst the transgender community as in the population at large. Some of the people you know may be transgender, yet you could never tell from the way they live their lives. After transition many merge invisibly into society in their new roles. However that still does not stop them from being rejected, discriminated against or condemned by society for being who they are, or from being made victims of harassment and guilt by the traditional doctrines of Christian Church. A recent report, which studied 3700 people, shows that more than four in five transgender young people have self-harmed and more than two in five transgender young people have attempted to take their own lives. For transsexuals the actual suicide rate is 8 to 10 times higher than that of the general population. There is a fundamental contradiction between science and theology, but up to now major religious traditions have put an absolute embargo on even considering the possibility of change to the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church.

In its battles against the gross sexual abuses of Roman Society, most notably in relation to same-sex acts, all sense of the moral duality that is inherent in gender and sexually variant behaviour has been lost and a universal condemnation has been applied. 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 sex. However to condemn all LGBT gender and sexually variant behaviour for the abuses of some, is akin to saying today that all members of a minority community are terrorists because some engage in terrorist acts. This is not just a matter of scapegoating by secular society. In the United States at the present time, senior members of the Catholic Church have been using its

people to identity documents consistent with their gender identity, including those documents which confer legal gender status. Such documents are essential to the ability of all people to enjoy rights and opportunities equal to those available to others; to access accommodation, education, employment, and health care; to travel; to navigate everyday transactions; and to enjoy safety. Transgender people, regardless of how they identify or appear, should enjoy the gender recognition all persons expect and deserve. Medical and other barriers to gender recognition for transgender individuals may harm physical and mental health. WPATH opposes all medical requirements that act as barriers to those wishing to change legal sex or gender markers on documents. These include requirements for diagnosis, counselling or therapy, puberty blockers, hormones, any form of surgery (including that which involves sterilization), or any other requirements for any form of clinical treatment or letters from doctors. WPATH argues that marital and parental status should not be barriers to recognition of gender change, and opposes requirements for persons to undergo periods living in their affirmed gender, or for enforced waiting or 'cooling off' periods after applying for a change in documents. Further, court and judicial hearings can produce psychological, as well as financial and logistical barriers to legal gender change, and may also violate personal privacy rights or needs. WPATH advocates that appropriate gender recognition should be available to transgender youth, including those who are under the age of majority, as well as to individuals who are incarcerated or institutionalized. WPATH recognizes that there is a spectrum of gender identities, and that choices of identity limited to Male or Female may be inadequate to reflect all gender identities. An option of X, NB (non-binary), or Other (as examples) should be available for individuals who so choose. WPATH urges governments to eliminate barriers to gender recognition, and to institute transparent, affordable and otherwise accessible administrative procedures affirming self-determination, when gender markers on identity documents are considered necessary. These procedures should be based in law and protect privacy. <http://www.wpath.org/>.

¹³ 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>

Gilchrist, S. (2017). 238P "Religious and Secular Scapegoating of Transgender People".

First Issued: 15 November 2017. Last update: 15 November 2017.

Printed: 17/11/2017 00:52

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

spap4144@gmail.com

3

traditional teaching to collude with the conservative Christian right when they condemn all transgender people as invariably being in pursuit of illicit or depraved sex^{14 15}. These concerns are compounded by the political changes that have recently taken place. In the USA the adviser to President Trump on domestic matters is on record as saying: *"Gays can be reformed, just like arsonists"*¹⁶. For both social and theological reasons there is now an urgent need to reconsider the traditional teaching of the Church.

There is still little evidence that many Churches are willing to move sufficiently on these matters. The medical methods for managing personality and identity driven conflicts are almost opposite to those which pursue rewards and desires. For as long as any Christian church continues to proclaim a doctrine which medically misdiagnoses how gender and sexual identities develop and excludes any consideration of the relationships between power, gender and sex from its remit, the abuses and discrimination against gender and sexually variant people will continue to take place. The 2017 report of the Church England "Bishop's Reflection Group on Sexuality" confined any future consideration to that of: "Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church". On the 16th February 2017 following the decision by the General Synod not to take note of the report of the Bishops Reflection Group the Archbishops of Canterbury and York wrote a letter to members of the Church of England which restated the same position. In the later paper: "Next Steps on Human Sexuality" also written by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and which was presented to the General of the Church of England on the 7th July 2017, the same constraints were again applied. Pope Francis has repeatedly stated that there can be no possibility of change to the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church.

In August 2016 Pope Francis stated: *"Its 'terrible' children taught they can choose gender"*. He also said there were powerful institutions which funded the spread of "gender theory" in schools. He told the Polish bishops: *"Today, children are taught this at school: that everyone can choose their own sex. And why do they teach this? Because the books come from those people and institutions who give money,"* he said. *"God created man and woman; God created the world like this and we are doing the exact opposite"*¹⁷. The same presumption that gender identity is entirely determined by biology in two letters to the "Times" newspaper¹⁸ published on the 15th November 2017. In one the Revd Dr Gavin Ashenden, signing himself as Missionary bishop for the Christian Episcopal Church states that: *"Sir, Your leading article (Nov 13) tells us of a 1,000 per cent increase in referrals of trans children in the past six years at the Tavistock clinic in London, suggesting a causal link between publicising gender fluidity and the increase of mental disorientation among the young. Progressive cultural values have produced the highest levels of mental distress among our young in*

¹⁴ In the United States, the legalisation of same-sex marriage by the Federal Government has resulted in a rash of mainly Southern states seeking to scapegoat transsexual people by legally enforcing them only to use toilets and bathroom facilities which correspond to the genitalia they were born with. This is irrespective of their gender identities and the transformations that they make. That position was supported by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Archbishop emeritus of Conakry (Guinea) and Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in the Catholic Church, during the address he gave to the, 12th Annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast held on Tuesday, May 17th, 2016 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Washington DC. The Cardinal's address can be seen on the link provided. Not only did the Cardinal support the movement to impose the bathroom ban, he also declared that gender identity and sexual orientation are defined by the biology of sex. [Accessed 14 June 2016]; <https://catholicprayerbreakfast.com/2016-video/>

¹⁵ In 2014, the Southern Baptist Convention approved a resolution at its annual meeting stating that "God's design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes, male and female" and that "gender identity is determined by biological sex, not by one's self-perception." Furthermore, the resolution opposes hormone therapy, transition-related procedures, and anything else that would "alter one's bodily identity," as well as opposing government efforts to validate transgender identity. <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2250/on-transgender-identity>

¹⁶ Nutt, Amy Ellis. (2016): *"Gays can be reformed, just like arsonists, Trump's new domestic policy adviser has said"*; Washington Post. November 19, 2016 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2016/11/19/gays-can-be-reformed-just-like-arsonists-trumps-new-domestic-policy-adviser-has-said/?utm_term=.824609a0a6e6

¹⁷ Pope Francis (2016): *"It's 'terrible' children taught they can choose gender"* Catholic Herald 3 August 2016 <http://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/08/03/pope-francis-its-terrible-children-taught-they-can-choose-gender/>

¹⁸ The Times (2017): *"Church of England and the gender debate"*: 15 November 2017 : <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/church-of-england-and-the-gender-debate-xbsf3lt3m>

recorded history. Melanie Phillips (Comment, Nov 14)¹⁹ rightly links this ideological struggle with the clash between traditional Christianity and progressive gender politics. Her analysis, that the Church will not only lose this struggle but will destroy itself in doing so if the present leadership of the Church of England continues its allegiance to secular values, is prescient. At stake lies not only the virtues that have underlain the best parts of our culture but the mental health of our most fragile children. As a society we urgently need to reject the politicising of gender identity and exaggerated notions of fluidity. We must allow our children to be safe in the given biology of their bodies". A second letter by Joshua Sutcliffe states: "Sir, As the teacher suspended for "misgendering" in your news report (Nov 13) I find it very unhelpful for the CofE to be a force in normalising behaviour and policy that have potentially grave consequences for our children, and which as a result also harm the ability of Christian teachers, parents and students to live out their faith in accordance with their sincerely held belief that we are all born biologically male or female. Statistics indicate that gender confusion itself and other co-morbidities lead to self-harm and suicide, not bullying. When we embrace and promote gender confusion, without questioning it or properly addressing it, we are doing our young people a tremendous disservice and are artificially reinforcing behaviour that will dissipate in 98 per cent of cases. No one doubts the genuineness of these concerns, but that does not excuse the harm that is created by an incorrect and uninformed approach.

In all of these cases the assumption is made that gender identity cannot be separated from the biology of sex. It is also argued that the freedom to explore gender identity is the cause of the mental distress. It is consequently argued that this mental confusion can be removed by enforcing male and female stereotypes upon children: which denies them the ability to accept the identity they possess. Science is also selectively used in a way which attempts to prove the correctness of the traditional Church teaching in ways that disregard much of the research that currently exists. The results of modern scientific research are dismissed. Instead they are regarded as pursuing transgender activism, a political agenda, or an emotional response²⁰. A full survey of current research and a scientific analysis has been conducted by this author. The survey is available at: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Gender and Sexual Malpractice and Abuse in the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/236P-Malpractice.pdf> and the results of the scientific analysis are described in: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice". <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>. The conclusions support the present day scientific consensus which is adopted by the great majority of professional medical and psychological institutions currently regard both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development and cannot be changed either by the individual concerned or by the predations of others in subsequent life²¹. Unlike biology the psychological concepts of gender can only develop as the brain develops and it is shown that the core features of personality and identity, including gender identity have become irreversibly established by the age of three years. This is before children have developed the cognitive abilities that are needed to make a choice.

Giving children the ability to explore gender identity enables them to find it, not to choose it. This investigation has demonstrated that the core gender identity, which defines who one is, is irrevocably formed at the latest by the age of three years, and the momentum of the process can set a direction from birth. By the time children gain the ability to explore their own gender identities; the core gender identity is fixed for life. That identifies the place of the individual in society, and no

¹⁹ Melanie Phillips: (2017): "The Church of England is sowing the seeds of its destruction: By embracing gender fluidity and gay rights, Anglican leaders are capitulating to secularism": The Times 14 November 2017

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-church-of-england-is-sowing-the-seeds-of-its-destruction-7b3wjjw87m>

²⁰ See section 7 of: Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Gender and Sexual Malpractice and Abuse in the Christian Church":

<http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/236P-Malpractice.pdf>

²¹ See the WPATH guidelines described earlier <http://www.wpath.org/>

behavioural implications are involved. No, Pope Francis, gender identity is not a choice. There are many gender and sexually variant people who, like you, disapprove of the activities of some in these groups and what the newspapers present. These results only ask that the same moral standards that are applied to the rest of the population are also applied to gender and sexually variant people, and that the moral range and identity driven nature of these conditions is respected. There is no tolerance of inappropriate or abusive cross-gender or sexual behaviour. Enormous guilt, self-loathing and hurt has been imposed on gender and sexually variant people by a traditional Church doctrine which condemns every expression of their identity as being a disordered lifestyle choice in pursuit of immoral sex.

Each year on the 20th November, which is designated the Transgender Day of Remembrance we commemorate all transgender people who have been murdered by others for being who they are, or who have taken their own lives because of the persecution they have endured. If this remembering is to be genuine we must also accept and recognise our own contributions to their harassment, and that must include a reassessment of the traditional doctrines of the Christian Church. Suggested talks/meditations and intercessions which may be used during religious services can be downloaded at: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/liturgies/tdor/tdor2017.htm>: These may be freely adapted and used as required. A meditation, which is based on the Prayer of St Francis, and suggested intercessions are also provided. A commentary, where these doctrines are examined has also been prepared. This is available online at: Gilchrist, Susan. (2017): "*Hearing without Listening: The Eunuch and the Christian Church*": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/013B-HearingWithoutListening.pdf>. While this document examines these issues from a scientific perspective, this commentary considers the same issues from a theological perspective. In the role of Jesus as the suffering servant the true message of the Gospel is revealed. As we reflect on these and as we hear the list of names of those who transgender people who have been murdered or who have taken their own lives because of the harassment of others, as Jesus died on the cross for us, he also died for these people too.

See <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/000B-SG-SelectedPapers.pdf> for the supporting research

© Susan Gilchrist 2017