

Religion and Psychology in Transgender Disputes¹

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SuR1125c

255P

23 November 2024

Transgender people are people whose gender identity does not fully correspond to that expected by their biological sex. This is an umbrella term which can be expressed in different ways. Transsexuals can be regarded as transgender people who completely identify with the gender which is opposite to that which is expected by their biological sex. The use of the word Transsexual does not imply in any way that transgender people change biological sex; and because of misconceptions, it is discouraged for more general use. In my own work, I liken transgender people to immigrants or emigrants, who seek to cross a notional and binary gender divide.

Current tensions arise in part because of a dispute about the nature of the conditions. One group, mainly the World Authorities Professional Medical Institutions consider transgender identities to be natural personality variations, within the normal range of development: And as internally focussed compulsions in search for a coherence of identity, which arise very early in life, where no threats to others are involved: And which cannot be changed; or become very difficult to change, either by the predations of others, or by the persons concerned later in life.

However, opposing groups consider them to be personality disruptions, and as hysterias which are sexually motivated perversions, paraphilias or disruptions; driven by desires for a role or the attractions of sex: Where scares over recruitment, capture, threats to women and children's safety and identity, and predations can arise: And when the motives, timescales and methods of management differ to the extent that what one side considers to be those of compassion and concern are almost inevitably regarded as recruitment, grooming, capture, and coercion by the other, it is essential to get the diagnosis correct.

Many opposing groups rely on the traditional social learning theories or Freudian psychodynamics to justify their arguments: But that leads to the diagnosis of transgender conditions as hysterias, driven by motives of behaviour and desire, which would place transgender people alongside sexual abusers: But for transgender people the reverse is the case. For truly transgender people the drive is instead an internally focussed and compulsive search for a coherence of identity; with the rejection of what is wrong, and the ability to live in ways that are true to their own identities, where no threats to others are encountered: it is not about behaviour or sexual desire. Being transgender is not an indication of sexual orientation. As wide a range of sexual orientations are found amongst transgender people as those which occur in society at large. The lived experiences and management methods for each of these diagnoses are almost opposite to each other. Great harm can occur when the wrong one is applied: and we are only aware of the consequences of this, since these core elements of personality and identity are formed before conscious awareness occurs.

This document is one of series where these conflicts are examined. The definition of the word "Woman" is also a contested term. The feminist pioneers used the term entirely to describe gender identities through the performance of gender, and the ways in which men and women interact to each other in society. Today other groups use the term to describe biology, and this early feminist definition is denied. Most people consider trans women to be women because of our behaviours, the ways we interact with society, our advocacy of feminist matters, and our expressions of common interests and concerns. Some opposing groups try to impose a totally fictional "gender ideology" on transgender people, which alleges that we believe we can

¹ Cite and access this document via: Gilchrist, S. (2024): "*Religion and Psychology in Transgender Disputes*" <https://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/255P-ReligionPsychology.pdf>. Other links are given at the end of the text.

"choose, change, or deny biological sex". Transgender people sometimes describe themselves as being *"born into the wrong body"*, but this is a truth of early personality formation, endocrinal influences, and earliest experience. And few, if any transgender people, believe that we literally change biological sex. Among transgender people who surgically transition, the terms *"Gender Reassignment Surgery"* or *"Gender Affirmation Surgery"* are most commonly used: Gender reassignment is also often urgently sought. However, for many, this is because they have fought the compulsions which have been created; often for many years, before attrition, exhaustion, and the need to transition becomes an overwhelming drive: So that attempts to apply *"Conversion Therapy"* are also known to invariably fail: Not least because many transgender people have been trying to practice this on themselves without success for many years: And they then have to deal with the dismissals of others, with the emptiness and guilt; which its attempted imposition creates, reinforced with the rejection which social and religious ideologies provide.

This is as much a dispute about how gender identities for everyone are created: For the World Authorities, and Professional Medical Institutions, gender identities are considered to be a foundational element of the personality and identity that everyone develops: Where the core element of this sense of identity, which involves the separation of the self from the other; and is expressed as an inner sense of being without behavioural implications, is formed very early in life. Thus, it becomes a foundation stone for the sense of identity that is created. In my own research I show that these core elements of personality and identity coalesce from previously fragmented thought around a median age of two years: It is different from the gender role identity, which conforms to the expectations which society creates, and this begins to be evident from a later median age of around three years. Opposing groups dismiss the influence of this core element of identity; together with the neurological and transformations which take place during this early period: Instead of this, they define gender identity solely as a *"collectively created concept determined entirely through interactions with the gender role"*. Many groups continue to use social learning and Freud's psychodynamic theories for their arguments, but these rely on cognition for their explanations: so, they cannot adequately explain how this pre-cognitive development occurs. Freud recognised this first three years of life to be a time of seething emotions; and he presumed that during it little constructive occurs. However, instead of treating this period as unknown, gender-critical groups specifically argue that nothing constructive happens during these early years. That has also led to conflicts in neuroscience: Cognitive neuroscientists, such as Rippon use MRI studies to argue that nothing constructive takes place: While behaviourist neuroscientists, such as Fordor, Goldman, and others, use MRI studies to explain it instead. These arguments are fully explored in my other work. That difference has significant implications, for incongruences of the core gender identity must be treated as personality variations, while disturbances to the gender role must be treated as personality disruptions instead.

Added to this are the disputes within the feminist communities between those who accept male-to-female transsexuals as the women they say they are: because that is the way they interact with society and see them as true allies in the feminist cause. While other feminist groups understand that no man, or male-to-female transsexual, can ever become a true feminist and no male-to-female transsexual can ever be identified as a woman, because biology or social conditioning means they will always be seen to seek power over women and threaten women's identities, safety, and lives. Other advances in neuroscience and anthropology pioneered by Girard, Dawkins, Gallese, and others from the 1960s onwards have shown that, far from the development of gender and other elements of personality and identity being receptive or reactive in nature: which is in line with the traditional social learning and psychodynamic theories: They are instead driven by strong innate forces involving possessive imitation, mirror neurons, empathy, and the like: These dominate from birth, and only progressively come under control over a period of at least three years: as the organising powers of cognition take greater effect. Therefore, in place of dismissing what happens during these first three years of life as being of little significance, it becomes a time of great importance instead.

However, centuries of criminalisation and condemnation on social and religious grounds of all gender and sexually variant behaviour has meant that the diagnosis of transgender conditions as sexually motivated perversions, paraphilias, or disruptions could never be challenged. And no report or review; scientific or otherwise, which today relies on definitions of gender identity and the stages of gender identification which date from the 1960s and sets its own terms of reference to dismiss these advances in neuroscience in the understanding of how personalities and identity develop during the first three to four years of life... even though their effects during puberty are considered: So that the only definition of gender identity that can be

considered to be correct is the one which defines it purely as a collectively created social concept, determined entirely through the interactions of the gender role. This ignores the viewpoints of the World Authorities and Professional Institutions, who describe the foundation of gender identity as a core element of the personalities and identities for everyone that are created. And it also takes the understanding of how gender identities develop back to a time when they were considered to be Freudian hysterias; and as perversions, paraphilias or disruptions, driven by desires for a role or the attractions of sex: And no report which does this could ever an independent report.

There should be no magic needed in determining the correct methods for managing transgender conditions. Since the different techniques required for managing personality variations and personality disruptions are well known, they are encountered in many other situations, and it should be easy to tell them apart. That evidence has resulted in a complete transformation in the attitudes of many in society, not just in relation to transgender conditions, but to all gender and sexually variant people: This is from ones which had previously considered their behaviours to be sexually motivated perversions or disruptions; to ones that now celebrate these relationships in same sex marriages, without needing an explanation, and accepts them as true expressions of love and identity instead. But for others, who rely on traditional doctrines, understandings and theologies, it also means that this is still profoundly denied. That is encountered in many conservative Christian traditions, right-wing Governments and countries where this information is ridiculed or discredited: Also, in others, where access is denied. There are many instances where the refusal to consider even the possibility that there may be errors in today's Church teaching is denied. A similar failure arises among many psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists, who dismiss the work of Girard, Dawkins, Gallese, Stoller and others; and who continue alongside McHugh and others, to rely on social learning theories or Freudian psychodynamics to diagnose transgender conditions as hysterias and personality disruptions, despite the advances that have since taken place.

I have likened transgender people who; as immigrants or emigrants, seek to cross a notional and binary gender divide. The abuse of any invitation on this journey is as harmful as it's denial: Where one approach may seek ways to welcome the stranger: while the other seeks to deny it instead. The horrendous history of violence, abuse, rape and discrimination against women means that there are many arguments for rejecting the activities of male-to-female transsexuals ever making this journey. The early Christian church had to find ways in a despotic male dominated society. It took only some 160 years for the egalitarian teaching of Jesus, who welcomed the outcast, the stranger, the deprived, and who treated women as equals of men in every way, to be turned into a teaching of the early Western Church, which deprived women from teaching, preaching, speaking, or engaging in any "manly" act. Transgender people form a small minority in the general population. Therefore many have to rely on what others say about us, and fears can be created through the use of misinformation, misplaced allegations, conspiracy theories, with the misappropriation of evidence that can arise: And in a world which today is increasingly being dominated by right-wing governments who are using these techniques to promote their own agendas through the creation of fear and anger among the general population, transgender people are becoming increasingly under attack. Where in many of these campaigns, religious reasons are given as justification for these attacks.

For many, that justification comes from the traditional teaching of the Christian Church. Yet even among the Apostles, there were differences in outlook. And it is seen in the attitude of Paul who looked forward to the day when the Christian Churches could be visions of a fully inclusive community, in a hostile and gender divided world *"There is no Jew, nor Greek, no slave, nor free man, no male, and female [There is not Jew, neither Greek; there is not servant, neither free man; there is not male, neither female]; for all you be one in Christ Jesus"*. This contrasts with Peter: who despite; or because of, his great devotion to his wife, treats women as the weaker partner: and takes a paternalistic, if not patronising approach: *"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives"*. All of these comments must be read through the smokescreens of disputed origins and how the early Church may have manipulated the texts, but the comments Peter is said to make about Paul *"as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures"*, does not suggest a uniformity of approach.

But there was another conflict, this time involving Peter and Paul, who took Christianity West into the Roman world, against Thomas who took it into the Persian world, and into a much more egalitarian society (though not necessarily so in today's understanding), where very different cultural values applied. The Council of Jerusalem was called in AD 51, when the radical nature of Paul's teaching was causing problems for the Church. This was marked soon after, with the forced departure of Thomas to India. Although the authenticity of the Gospel of Thomas may justly be questioned, the trends in it are interesting: Peter is demoted to the statue of "a wise messenger", Paul is never mentioned. The status of all women, notably Mary Magdalene is raised, and the male disciples are regarded as somewhat dumb in comparison. Whatever the authenticity of the Gospel, these differences may have been the key features which set the Eastern and Western Churches off on different trajectories: One area of difference related to the blame placed on Eve and on all women for the "Fall" of Adam in the Garden of Eden. In the Western Church, women were expected to do penance for this during their earthly lives. Although both sexes were to be treated with equal esteem, and corresponding blame was also placed on Adam, Eve was considered the active partner. And this led to the horrendous repression of women in the Western Church from the fourth century onwards. In the Eastern Church, women were instead considered to be redeemed from the sins of Eve from the moment the Virgin Mary said "yes" to bearing the Christ Child. So all women were freed from blame from that moment onwards: And that could lead to a much more egalitarian approach, in a way that would not have been possible in Roman society. Both sections of the Church put great emphasis on celibacy. However, this aspect also had different perspectives: For the Western Church, the main aim of this could be said to avoid the horrors, evils, and distractions of sex, while the sometimes-extreme asceticism that its adoption promoted in the Eastern Church, was for devotion to the Gospel message.

Much of the teaching in the Eastern Church, which at one time was much larger than the Western Church, has now been lost to us, when it was largely wiped through the rise of Islam in the 14th century: And when its libraries were subsequently destroyed. Also, it did not have a sufficiently strong central authority to ensure that orthodoxy was preserved. However, we do have some indication of what this Church may have been like within the Irish Church, who took much of its inspiration from Eastern Church: Indeed St. Patrick was regarded as the "Apostle to the Irish" by this ancient Eastern Church. Although the Irish Celtic Church never split from Rome; unlike the Eastern Church, which was divorced from Rome in the fifth Century; it still carried much of the ethos of the Eastern Church with it. In both churches the same extremes of celibacy, with a similar reliance on monastic practices and traditions are encountered. Celibacy was considered of prime importance; but it did not mark the dividing line between same-sex and heterosexual relationships: since both were subject to equally strong penalties when breaches occurred. The penalties against sexual abuses were much stronger, and this would seem to be the major concern. There is remarkably little discussion about what today may be considered as homosexuality in this Irish Church. Among the Irish lay population its practice was regulated to preserve social status and prevent abuse, but no absolute prohibition was applied. And there is no evidence that St Patrick sought to apply one. Christian history during the first millennium is littered with instances where strong, intimate, and loving, but celibate same-sex relationships between many of its most prominent saints were encountered.

That was to change from the 12th Century onwards following disturbances in the Church. And in the 13th Century Thomas Aquinas used the principles of Natural Law; put forward by Aristotle, which is based on the principles of virtue and love; in his attempts to rationalise the teaching of the Church. It also draws close to the teaching of Jesus in the New Covenant where the same principles of virtue and love are likewise applied. By itself natural law does not prohibit engagement in any loving and committed same-sex or transgender acts. But by using his argument that the theology of the Church always trumps the principles of natural law, when the two are in conflict, Aquinas extended the prohibition of same-sex intercourse to condemn all forms of sexual intimacy or cross gender behaviour outside a Church recognised heterosexual marriage, regardless of purpose or intent, as the progenitors of lust and depravities of sex. It is this transformation which provides the basis of what today is regarded as the traditional teaching of the Church: which condemns all homosexual behaviour, and by extension all transgender behaviour as "*intrinsically ordered and depraved sexual behaviour for the purposes of sexual gratification and denying the gift of life*". However, it is also Paul who gets a bad press in all of this, because of the way the Church has later manipulated his teaching, and through the compromises he made; along with Peter, to ensure the survival of the Church. Today, instead of the Christian Churches shining out as a beacon of light and of full inclusion, where "*There is no Jew, nor Greek, no slave, nor free man, no male, and female, for all you be one in Christ Jesus*". And to act as a witness to

the Gospel message in a dark and divided world, it is this religious condemnation which gives strength to the social and secular scapegoating, not just of transgender people, but of all gender and sexually variant people. And it is these Churches themselves that give the fullest expression to this darkest side.

These may be dark days for all of us: But for religious, atheists and humanists alike, there is still something to be gained in the example that Jesus presents. For it was Jesus who welcomed the stranger, the outcast, the rejected, and the condemned. It was Jesus who welcomed the centurion and slave who dared to cross the sexual divide: When providing sexual comfort was the expected duty of his slave at the time. And in the unqualified welcome in a gospel of virtue and love, there is no evidence that Jesus condemned any physical act. For Jesus, some people are born eunuchs, some people are made eunuchs by others; and some people make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This passage caused a great deal of difficulty for the early Church, as it was taken to refer to the self-castrated priests of the Goddess cults who frequented Palestine at the time. Although Jesus recognised that some people would find this difficult to accept: the commands were very direct. And in a Gospel of love and virtue, there is no evidence of Jesus condemning any of these physical acts. For Paul, circumcision was of no consequence. For Thomas, life in the spirit transcends every physical act. And it was Jesus who welcomed the stranger despite the great challenges of his own society. And so, for us, in the devastating challenges we face in today's society, the call of Jesus to us, is the same call for everyone, who seeks to live in ways that are true to their own identities and to the highest standards of the Gospel message: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people alike.

But these are not conflicts where villainy should be assumed, or blame should always be applied. The vast majority of people involved are innocent well-intentioned people passionately doing what they believe is right. There is every reason to count both you and me among them. But it was Jesus who welcomed the stranger and who challenged the views of the Pharisees, Sadducees, the secular and religious authorities, and the institutions of his own day. If we too are not prepared to ask the same questions, impose the same challenges, and to seek the same answers: but instead build our own views on the fears, misinformation and prejudices that surround us: which may be from other well-intentioned people, then we too increase the fears, anger, rejection and exclusions that have already been created.

On the 20th. November each year we mark the Transgender Day of Remembrance, when we commemorate all those transgender people who have been murdered simply for trying to live in ways that are true to their own identities or have taken their own lives because of the condemnation of others. Instead of falling into despair, let this inspire us to work for a better world to find ways to welcome the stranger. And let us not rely on the fear and anger created by the misinformation of others, to further enforce that rejection. So that we all together: heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people alike can live in ways that are true to our own identities, and in happy and fulfilled lives.

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This description also makes use of my own research, which confirms and supports the conclusions of the Word Authorities and Professional medical Institutions. Access to this work and commentaries on the recently published Cass Review are given on the Bibliography tab of my website: tgdr.co.uk or use the links below.

Resources

To access these documents, type tgdr.co.uk into your internet browser, then click on the bibliography tab, or access via the links given below:

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Additional Documents

Gilchrist, S. (2024): "*Religion and Psychology in Transgender Disputes*". 255P
First Issued: 23 November 2024. Last update: 23 November 2024 spap4144@gmail.com Printed: 25/11/2024 14:35
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