

# Are we all 'omnigender' now?

## Introduction: the deconstruction of sexual distinctions

An elite women's college in America, Wellesley College, recently clarified its admissions policy. They will admit (biological) *men* who claim to be *women*. They will not admit (biological) *women* who claim to be *men*.<sup>1</sup> The assumption is that objective physical reality (biological sex) is irrelevant. 'Gender' is all in the mind. We can define ourselves.

The campaign to recognise the 'right' to 'change gender' is not just about creating choice for some. It is destroying our shared understanding of what 'man' means and what 'woman' means.

Using gendered language (he/she; men/women) is regarded by some activists as 'hate speech', wrongfully imprisoning people in one of two categories. Just as some radical feminists claim that sexist language, or even using generic language, is an 'act of violence', some say that they feel violated by gendered language. There have been calls for the creation of a 'transphobic' hate crime.

To understand where this thinking has come from, we need, firstly, to understand the current worldview of 'expressive individualism' (or total personal freedom). Secondly, to consider the rapid acceptance of 'queer theory'. Thirdly, to understand how health professionals and the law have accommodated this shift in thinking. And fourthly we will point to a biblical response.

### 1. The current worldview: expressive individualism

#### A. Freedom from being defined by God

The dominant worldview in our culture denies that we are created by God. We can claim freedom to construct ourselves and define our own identity. But if we are the only point of reference, then how do we know what, or who, we are? As John Calvin wrote at the beginning of his *Institutes*, we cannot know who *we* are unless we know who *God* is.<sup>2</sup> The Christian worldview begins with Creation. Our triune, personal, relational God created men and women in his own image to relate to him, and to relate to each other.

#### B. Freedom from being ruled by God's law

Once we deny that there is a God who will judge us, then we deny that there are moral laws that are true for everyone, at every time, in every place. The only remaining moral absolute is to be faithful to yourself, or to find your own identity. This can be described as 'expressive individualism'. By contrast, the Bible teaches that all humans have the knowledge of God's moral law on their hearts, and we will each be judged according to the conscience he has given us.

#### C. Freedom from being defined by others

In the past, an individual's identity was often defined in reference to their role in society, community and family. Individual aspirations might be put to one side in the interest of the wider group. Now, by contrast, the expectation in Western society is that each individual has a primary duty to self. You

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<sup>1</sup> Wellesley College Admission Policy, FAQs, <https://www.wellesley.edu/admission/faq#transgender> accessed 6 March 2016

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, J, trans. Battles, FL, Westminster Press, Vol. 1, Chapter 1, p. 37

only have one life, so live it to the full, find your own identity, and fulfil yourself. Expressive individualism is the logical outworking of scientific naturalism (the belief that this life is all there is). In the past in Western society, if you felt that you were a woman ‘trapped’ in a man’s body or *vice versa*, there was the restraining factor of the duty to be faithful to wider family and community roles. Now you are told that the ‘right’ thing to do is to ‘be yourself’. The corresponding ‘moral absolute’ is to affirm everyone else’s ‘right’ to be themselves.

## 2. Queer theory and gender fluidity

‘First wave’ feminism focused on campaigning for equal rights for women. By the 1960s, radical feminists argued that to maintain *any* gender distinctions propped up the edifice of oppressive patriarchy. The fight against discrimination morphed into a fight against gender identity. For the last forty years or so, despite more research than ever before on the differences between the sexes, it has been commonplace to hear that gender is ‘plastic’.<sup>3</sup> It is now said that we can decide for ourselves what gender we belong to and what that means for us. The idea that there is any essential difference between the sexes (‘essentialism’) has been defined by some as heresy.<sup>4</sup> Judith Lorber, a radical feminist, wrote:

*When we no longer ask ‘boy or girl?’ in order to start gendering an infant, when the information is as irrelevant as the colour of a child’s eyes... only then will men and women be socially interchangeable and really equal. And when that happens there will no longer be any need for gender at all.*<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, those campaigning for gay rights asserted that the assumption that heterosexuality is ‘normal’ is hateful, and the belief that heterosexual marriage is foundational to societal stability is oppressive. Judith Butler argued in the now-classic *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the binary framework for both sex and gender is merely a ‘regulatory fiction’ that consolidates the ‘convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression’.<sup>6</sup> The Gay Liberation Front named rejection of homosexuality as a ‘sickness and a sin’ and inaugurated the era of ‘gay pride’.<sup>7</sup> The theory underpinning this became known as ‘queer theory’ – a self-designation that set out to gain attention. The aim was to challenge ‘heteronormativity’ in every discipline. Judith Butler and others argued that not only is *gender* a social construct, *sexual differentiation* itself need not be fixed. If our *sexual orientation* is fluid, and something we are free to choose, then why not our *sexual identity* as well? They maintained that heterosexuals are, in fact, repressing latent homosexuality, and society as a whole needs to be liberated from such repression.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1980s and 1990s a new collective identity emerged of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people.<sup>9</sup> The trans-affirming worldview takes the moral high ground. It is

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<sup>3</sup> This was facilitated by easy access to contraception and artificial reproductive technologies, both of which separated sex from procreation. Marriage came to be regarded as primarily about ‘relationship’ (i.e.: emotional and sexual fulfilment). Single parenthood was facilitated by means of welfare provision and state-funded childcare. Having children became a ‘right’ to be claimed by single people outside of partnership by means of assisted reproductive technology.

<sup>4</sup> Robert S McElvaine defines essentialism as the heresy that there are biological differences between males and females. Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty*, Touchstone, 2000, p.87

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, Doubleday, London, 1999, p.324

<sup>6</sup> Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, 1999, p.44

<sup>7</sup> Peter Tatchell, ‘Equality is not enough’, *Capital Gay*, 14 October 1994, [http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt\\_rights/history/equality\\_not\\_enough.htm](http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/history/equality_not_enough.htm), accessed 20 January 2011

<sup>8</sup> Sanlon, Peter, *Plastic People*, The Latimer Trust, 2010, pp.21-24

<sup>9</sup> To be superseded by LGBTIQA : Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex, Questioning (or Queer), and Allies, or subsumed under the umbrella term Queer. However, at present, a vociferous gay lobby is campaigning for the ‘T’ to be dropped from the collective identity.

thought to be *abusive* to assign people rigidly to one sex. It is thought to be *hateful* not to allow people to choose (or 'recognise') their own unique identity.

Most people may never have heard of 'queer theory'. But, with astonishing speed, the notion of gender fluidity has permeated our culture, and it is often regarded as offensive and bigoted to challenge it (even if you are Germaine Greer or Peter Tatchell). A recent guide to transphobic hate crimes defines 'transphobia' as 'intolerance of gender diversity... based around the idea that there are only two sexes – male or female, which you stay in from birth.'<sup>10</sup> How has this shift in thinking happened so quickly?

**A.** The media and entertainment have relentlessly focused on 'trans' issues. Newspapers, soap operas and films have promoted the idea that it is wrong to divide humanity between men and women. Teens and pre-teens follow a TV reality show featuring Jazz, a 15-year-old American boy who is 'becoming a girl'. Jazz's parents are presented as role models of loving support of their child. In December 2015, *The Danish Girl* hit the big screen, telling the story of one of the first men to undergo 'gender reassignment' surgery.<sup>11</sup>

**B.** Social media. Parents are increasingly reporting the phenomenon of 'social contagion', children and teenagers are sharing ideas and experiences on social media such as Tumblr, and transgenderism is the current preoccupation for many of them. Increasing numbers of children and young people are presenting as transgender.<sup>12</sup>

**C.** The education system. Primary school children are being taught that 'sex' is between your legs, but 'gender' is between your ears, and they don't necessarily have anything to do with each other. Stonewall has been granted significant funding to go into schools to conduct 'anti-bullying' programmes, and they promote the idea of gender fluidity to children.<sup>13</sup> The support group Mermaids promotes educating children about transgender issues.<sup>14</sup> The advocacy and support group Gendered Intelligence offers to take creative workshops in schools for children of all ages.<sup>15</sup> Educate

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<sup>10</sup> Galop, 'Transphobia fact sheet', <http://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Transphobia-A4.pdf>, accessed 7 April 2016

<sup>11</sup> Walt Heyer has written a clear resume and critique of this film in Public Discourse. Heyer, Walt, 'People aren't born transgender, but playing dress-up can spark psychological problems', Public Discourse, <http://anglicanmainstream.org/the-danish-girl-people-arent-born-transgender-but-playing-dress-up-can-spark-psychological-problems/>, accessed 6 March 2016. Further, it should be noted that there is evidence that Einar Wegener/Lili Elbe (*The Danish Girl*) was actually an intersex person. According to these sources, when the surgery was underway it was discovered that there were female organs already:

<http://oiiuk.org/1369/the-trouble-with-the-danish-girl/>, accessed 9 March 2016;

<http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/danish-girl/>, accessed 9 March 2016

<sup>12</sup> See John Bingham, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 December, 2015, 'Eighty Primary School Pupils a year seeking help to change gender', <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/12070632/80-primary-school-pupils-a-year-seeking-help-to-change-gender-charity.html>, and Mark Else, 'Gender Transition for Four-Year Olds: Meet the Latest Liberal Madness', *Conservative Woman*, 29 December 2015, <http://www.conservativewoman.co.uk/mark-else-gender-transition-for-four-year-olds-meet-the-latest-liberal-madness/>, accessed 6 March 2016

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting\\_started\\_toolkit\\_-\\_primary.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting_started_toolkit_-_primary.pdf), accessed 7 April 2016

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/>, accessed 6 March 2016

<sup>15</sup> [www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/](http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/), accessed 7 April 2016, go to section professionals/education/creative workshops. For sample resources see <http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/trans-youth/resources>, for example, 'The TransYouth Sexual Health booklet. <http://cdn0.genderedintelligence.co.uk/2012/11/17/17-14-04-GI-sexual-health-booklet.pdf> This includes statements such as: "If you identify as a man or somewhere on the masculine spectrum and find yourself pregnant, that does not make you a woman, rather you are a person who is

and Celebrate, another LGBT support and advocacy organisation, delivers 'LGBT+Inclusive training to staff, support staff, departments, leadership teams, parents and governors in children's centres, nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities, public and private organisations'.<sup>16</sup> For example, their 'PRIDE in Early Years Education' is a range of picture books, activities and lesson plans to help make children's centres and nursery schools 'LGBT+Friendly':

The resources and accompanying training will enable teachers and pupils to explore different families, gender identities and feeling different through the use of beautifully illustrated picture books, activities, films and songs.<sup>17</sup>

They present gender identity as a combination of masculinity, femininity, and other genders, each on a spectrum, independent of the sex assigned at birth.<sup>18</sup> Birmingham City Council (in its education role) has arranged for Educate and Celebrate staff training and assembly resources to be available in all its schools. At least one Birmingham school is not allowing parents to withdraw children, following advice from the City Council's legal department. The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIREs) sends out guidelines to schools. These say that schools should ensure that toilets and changing facilities are 'immediately available in line with new gender presentation, and the young person's wishes'.<sup>19</sup> As these organisations gain entry to more and more schools (and nurseries), usually under the 'anti-bullying' guise, promotion of LGBT ideology and in particular the promotion of the idea of gender fluidity will increase exponentially.

**D.** Many liberal churches have embraced 'diversity' as a cause to promote. Both the organisations Press for Change and Changing Attitude encourage churches to advertise that they are 'welcoming and diverse communities who embrace equality'.<sup>20</sup> Susan Cornwall has written a theology of gender which claims to support this model of diversity from Scripture modified by experience.<sup>21</sup> Liberal theologian Virginia Mollenkott says that we are all 'omnigender'.<sup>22</sup> Why choose one gender or another? Why not enjoy multiple identities?

### **3. Accommodating gender fluidity: healthcare professionals and the law**

The issue of transsexualism is distinct from the issue of intersex conditions, though some campaigners have deliberately sought to confuse the two. Tragically, there are very rare cases of babies whose sex at birth is ambiguous. The incidence of all intersex conditions is rare. In fact they

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pregnant." Also, A Guide for Young Trans People in the UK, <http://cdn0.genderedintelligence.co.uk/2012/11/17/17-15-02-A-Guide-For-Young-People.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.educateandcelebrate.org/training>, accessed 7 April 2016

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.educateandcelebrate.org/resources/> accessed 10 May 2016

<sup>18</sup> Educate and Celebrate, Trans+Tips for Teachers

<sup>19</sup> GIREs guidelines, 'Transition of a Pupil in School'. [www.gires.org.uk/education/information-for-educators](http://www.gires.org.uk/education/information-for-educators), accessed 6 March 2016. Also, in the guidelines to schools about teachers transitioning, schools are told that toilets and changing rooms must be made available to people in their new presenting gender. "If others do not wish to share the 'ladies' or 'gents' with a trans-person, then it is they, not the trans-person, who must use alternative facilities." GIREs guidelines, 'Transition of a Teacher in School', p.8

<sup>20</sup> By 2000 two Church of England clergy had transitioned from male to female and remained in ministry. Christina Beardsley, 'The Transsexual is my neighbour: Pastoral Guidelines for Christian Clergy, Pastors and Congregations', The Gender Trust, p.4. One of ministers was Rev. Peter Stone, who returned to pastoral work in Swindon in 2000 as Rev. Carol Stone. Victoria Combe, 'Sex-change vicar tells how her prayers have been answered', The Daily Telegraph, 29 November 2000

<sup>21</sup> Cornwall, S, ed., *Intersex, Theology and the Bible*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

<sup>22</sup> Mollenkott, V.R., *Omnigender: A trans-religious approach*, Pilgrim Press, 2007

involve approximately fewer than 2 out of every 10,000 births (0.02%).<sup>23</sup> True hermaphrodites, where a person has both ovarian and testicular tissue, are very rare: one review found fewer than 5 cases per year worldwide.<sup>24</sup> Such cases have to be dealt with individually.<sup>25</sup>

Unless born with an intersex condition, every baby is biologically male or female (which is determined by chromosomes, genitalia etc.). In the past it was assumed that someone's gender (the psychological, social and cultural aspects of being male or female) would line up with their biological sex. But now, the emphasis is placed on individual freedom to assert their own 'gender identity' (i.e. their own unique experience as to 'how they feel about themselves as either male, female, or neither').

Transsexual people are biologically normal but believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex. The term transsexual implicitly accepts the binary of two opposite sexes. A transsexual person wants to 'reassign' their biological sex (usually through hormonal, cosmetic and possibly surgical procedures) to match their preferred 'gender identity'. Transsexualism is a psychological not a physical dysfunction. It is only within the last sixty years that the medical profession has accepted transsexualism as a condition which may be treated by means of hormonal and surgical intervention, as medical and scientific advances have enabled 'sex reassignment' treatment by means of hormones and surgery.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that this condition is different from both transvestism, which involves dressing and presenting as the opposite sex, often for sexual arousal, and from 'drag queens', where men dress as women for the purpose of entertaining others.

Transgender is an umbrella term for the different ways people experience or live out their 'gender identity' when there is a perceived incongruence with their biological sex. This term is increasingly more popular than the term transsexual. The term transgender can imply an acceptance of 'gender fluidity' – that it is inherently oppressive to divide people into two binary categories. Hence the celebrated 71 different gender identities available to choose from on Facebook.

While the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* (2000) used the term Gender Identity Disorder (GID) for those suffering incongruence between their biological sex and the way they identified themselves, the 2013 edition replaced that with the term Gender Dysphoria.<sup>27</sup> This shifted the emphasis from gender incongruence as a 'disorder', to emphasis on the distress (dysphoria) associated with the experience of that incongruence. The change was ideologically driven, the aim being to 'de-pathologise' gender incongruence.<sup>28</sup> The definition of this condition has changed once and it may be further redefined in future. What causes a person to be distressed about their biological sex is disputed. Some believe that there are 'brain-sex' issues; some suggest environmental triggers; some prefer to look at psychosocial factors; many would suggest a combination of reasons. For children and young people there can now be strong social factors encouraging a celebration of 'fluidity'.

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<sup>23</sup> Sax L, 'How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling', *Journal of Sex Research*, 2002, 39(3), page 177

<sup>24</sup> van Niekirk, W A, 'True Hermaphroditism', *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 126(7), 1976, pages 890-907

<sup>25</sup> The Christian Institute, briefing on intersex conditions, [www.christian.org.uk/transsexualism/intersex\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.christian.org.uk/transsexualism/intersex_briefing.pdf), accessed 10 March 2016

<sup>26</sup> The first Gender Identity Clinic opened in Britain at Charing Cross Hospital in 1966

<sup>27</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*, 2013, is the standard classification of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in the United States.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Saunders, Lecture on Gender Dysphoria at CMF East Anglia Day, March 2016

Neither is there firm consensus on treatment. But the increasingly favoured approach is to allow patients to 'self-diagnose' and then agree to hormonal treatment or surgical treatment if that is desired (in other words to alter the body to conform to the professed gender identity). In parallel with this, the trend is to outlaw counselling or psychotherapy to help alter the felt identity to conform to the biological sex. There is vigorous debate about what is the appropriate treatment for children presenting with gender dysphoria. Some advocate puberty suppression (hypothalamic hormone suppression at ages 10-13) as a means of making ultimate 'sex reassignment' less traumatic.

The Gender Recognition Act (2004) came into effect in 2005.<sup>29</sup> It permits transsexual people who have lived in their assumed sex for at least two years to apply to the Gender Recognition Panel for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). Applicants need to provide a medical referral, but do not need to have undergone hormonal or surgical treatment. A GRC entitles someone to live 'for all purposes' (including marriage) in their acquired gender.<sup>30</sup> They are able to apply for a new birth certificate, indicating their new legal sex and name. The original birth certificate, although still existing, does not have to be disclosed. Once a person obtains a GRC, it is an offence to disclose their birth sex, with fines of up to £5,000.

In January 2005, The Christian Institute urged church leaders to lobby for exceptions to the disclosure offence in order to protect religious freedom. In March 2005, the Government agreed to give protection to church leaders in relation to marriage, employment, membership and admission to the sacraments. These important protections still stand.

Gender reassignment has been made a protected characteristic, in the same way as race or religion, in the Equality Act 2010.

In 2013 the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act made it possible for a marriage to continue following one spouse's gender transition, provided the other spouse agreed.

In 2014 the NHS began providing puberty suspending hormonal treatment for young people who believe they are the opposite sex.

In January 2016, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee published the report *Transgender Equality*,<sup>31</sup> which claimed that the 2004 Act is outdated, in that it 'medicalises' and 'pathologises' those who are transgender. The term 'transsexual' is regarded as outdated; as are the terms Gender Identity Disorder and Gender Dysphoria. Being 'trans' is no longer a 'problem' to be treated, but an identity to be embraced. The report recommends that:

- There should be no need for someone to live in their assumed sex for two years before applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate.
- They should not have to seek authorisation from a doctor.

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<sup>29</sup> Gender Recognition Act 2004 (c. 7), [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga\\_20040007\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040007_en_1), accessed 21 July 2009

<sup>30</sup> At the time of the 2004 Act (which was passed before the recognition of same-sex marriages), full certificates were available for unmarried people. Married people had to apply for an interim certificate. If their marriage was subsequently ended they were entitled to a full certificate. A trans-man (female to male) would be allowed to marry a woman once the full certificate had been obtained; similarly a trans- female) would be allowed to marry a male. Trans-people who wished to continue in partnership with a previous spouse had to have their marriage annulled, and then enter a civil partnership as this would now be a same-sex partnership (for instance, a trans-man, female to male, might wish to continue with their previous husband).

<sup>31</sup> House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *Transgender Equality*, January 2016, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/390/390.pdf>, accessed 4 March 2016

- Changing sex should be a quick and simple administrative change.
- In the future, as much documentation as possible should not require declaration of sex.
- Young people aged 16 and 17 should be able to change sex.
- It should be easier for children to access hormones to block puberty.
- Consideration should be given to the ‘needs’ of children whose parents do not consent to such treatment.

The report also recommends that many of the protections and exemptions allowed in the 2004 Act (with regard, for example, to genuine occupational requirements) should be rescinded. It claims that there are around 650,000 transgender people in Britain today, but offers no convincing evidence for that figure.<sup>32</sup> Only 4,000 gender recognition certificates have been granted under the 2004 Act.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. A Biblical Response

The supposed split between the ‘real you’ and the appearance of your body is a new form of Gnosticism. It divides your mind or thoughts from the physical reality of the body. It says that your mind, your soul, your thoughts, are more important, and can overrule the physical facts. In New Testament times, this heresy claimed that Jesus may have risen from the dead spiritually, but not physically. Gnosticism divides what God has united. We are made as whole people. Our body, our mind and our spirit or soul are not to be divided or played off against each other.<sup>34</sup> God specifically designs and determines our body. It reflects his intent. It is not irrelevant (Psalm 139:13-14; Jer. 1:5). God deliberately created male and female as different and interdependent (Gen. 2:18; 21-24), and he prohibits the blurring of gender identity (Deut. 22:5).

The biblical position is that it is not possible to change sex. A person may be tempted by transsexual thoughts, but they should not embrace the lifestyle of the opposite sex.<sup>35</sup> Treating every individual with true compassion and respect means staying true to God’s revealed will in all pastoral care and interaction. There are various reasons why an individual may feel a measure of unease with their gender identity; and some of those reasons (for example childhood trauma) may well involve being sinned against, rather than deliberately sinning. But actually assuming the identity of someone of

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<sup>32</sup> ‘It is telling that there is a lack of good quality statistical data regarding trans people in the UK. Current estimates indicate that some 650,000 people are “likely to be gender incongruent to some degree”, Report, p.6. But the term ‘gender incongruent’ is so vague as to be meaningless. Between April 2005 and January 2010, 2,551 Full and 140 Interim Certificates were issued. In 2009, a Home Office Report found that, to date, prevalence was 20 per 100,000, i.e. 10,000 people, of whom 6,000 had undergone transition (80% trans-women). At that date, 1,200 per annum were undertaking transition to a new gender role. In 2010, the BBC reported that a Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust survey found Gender Identity Disorder (GID) affected one in every 4,000 people. Assuming that Britain’s population is now somewhere around 65 million, that would put the total with GID at 16,250. But KJ Zucker, et al, Gender Dysphoria in Adults, Annual Review of Clinical Psychologists, 2016, states that fewer than 1 in 10,000 adult natal males suffer gender dysphoria and fewer than 1 in 30,000 adult natal females. That would put the number in the UK at something over 4,000 (cited in CMF Files 59, Gender Dysphoria).

<sup>33</sup> Government statistics, see Table 5.1 here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/483764/tribunals-main-tables.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/483764/tribunals-main-tables.xlsx)

<sup>34</sup> Peter Jones, who blogs on the Truth Exchange, is excellent on this. See also Jones, P, Gospel Truth, Pagan Lies, Main Entry Editions/Winepress Publishing, 1999

<sup>35</sup> This was the position taken by the Evangelical Alliance Policy Commission, transsexuality (London: EA Policy Commission/Paternoster Press, 2000). The report concluded: “Authentic change from a person’s given sex is not possible and an ongoing transsexual lifestyle is incompatible with God’s will as revealed in Scripture and in creation. We would oppose recourse to gender reassignment surgery as a normal valid option for people suffering from gender dysphoria on a biblical basis. We note, in addition, that no long-term research exists to validate the effectiveness of such surgery in effecting gender change.” Ibid., pp.84-85

the opposite sex does involve sin. Medical interventions, whether hormone treatments or surgery, are to be rejected. It is absolutely wrong to encourage children to change sex. For further information see The Christian Institute website.<sup>36</sup>

Positively, in the US there has been a robust response from conservative evangelicals. In 2014 the Southern Baptist Convention adopted formal resolutions affirming the biblical teaching about the immutability of sex and gender.<sup>37</sup> In 2015, the first ever evangelical conference on transgender issues was convened by the Association of Biblical Counsellors. Last year Al Mohler wrote *We Cannot Be Silent*, dealing clearly and biblically with this and related ethical issues.

This is a front-line issue for us as Bible-believing Christians. It is something we need to engage with, not just in terms of information, but in terms of pastoral concern and prayer. It is a front-line issue not least because the 'new morality' asserts that it is hateful and bigoted not to celebrate diversity. It will not be long before gendered speech (use of terms man, woman, boy, girl, etc.) is regarded as hate speech. There will be pressure to censor sermons. There will be resistance to teaching children God's design for men and women. There will be huge free speech implications.

We need to be aware that many professing evangelicals now believe that personal experience is an authority alongside Scripture. Just as many evangelicals have, over the past fifty years, 'accommodated' homosexuality, so now there is pressure to 'accommodate' those who are distressed about their birth sex. The most comprehensive work to date from an evangelical publishing house, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* is, in fact, based on listening to the testimonies of transsexuals who profess to be Christian.<sup>38</sup> Mark Yarhouse accepts that Scripture teaches that the 'ideal' would be for everyone to live according to their biological sex. But, in a fallen world, he believes that those who suffer extreme dysphoria may need to be accommodated, in order to manage their distress. This may involve accepting them as the sex they believe themselves to be, and recognising the need for medical intervention in some cases. Another significant work published by IVP (US), *The End of Sexual Identity*, accepts the idea that humanity should not be rigidly divided between male and female but that we are all on a spectrum.<sup>39</sup>

While resisting the elevation of personal experience to be an authority alongside Scripture, and while holding the fundamental biblical truth "male and female created he them", we must always demonstrate deep pastoral concern for those who are, after all, the victims of a culture which has denied biblical truth. Here are some suggestions:

#### **A. We should question over-exaggerated stereotypes of masculinity and femininity**

Some stereotypes are cultural, not biblical. Yes, we believe that the complementarity qualities of male and female are designed by God and mirror deeper realities within God himself. But as Al Mohler writes:

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.christian.org.uk/resources/theology/apologetics/other/transsexualism/>, accessed 4 March 2016

<sup>37</sup> 2014, The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Resolutions on Gender by Denny Burk and Andrew Walker, <http://www.dennyburk.com/southern-baptists-pass-resolution-on-transgender-sbc14/>, accessed 6 March 2016

<sup>38</sup> Yarhouse, M., *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, IVP, US, 2015. Robert Gagnon provides a helpful review here: 'How should Christians respond to the Transgender phenomenon?' *First Things*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/09/how-should-christians-respond-to-the-transgender-phenomenon>, accessed 6 March 2016

<sup>39</sup> Paris, J.W., *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is too Important to Define Who We Are*, IVP, US, 2011. There is a lengthy critique of this book by Peter Jones here: 'Heterosexuality is an abomination', <https://truthxchange.com/articles/2011/05/14/heterosexuality-is-an-abomination/>, accessed 6 March 2016



*...in a fallen world there can be exaggerations and corruptions of what it means to be a man and a woman. There are some very brutalistic corruptions of masculinity, and there are some very trivial and hyper-sexualised understandings of the female that the Bible would clearly reject.<sup>40</sup>*

Just because a little boy is unusually artistic and gentle does not mean that he should be pushed into thinking of himself as homosexual or transgender. A little girl may be sporty and tomboyish, but that doesn't mean that she should be pushed into identifying as lesbian or trans. Behaviours that would have been accepted as within the normal range even a few years ago, (girls wanting to play boys' games or boys not wanting to engage in rough-and-tumble games), are now being interpreted as gender confusion. This defies common sense.

## **B. Always remember human dignity**

The trans-affirming movement demands that human dignity is only respected when we accept the premise that we are autonomous, on the basis that there is no creator God, so we can determine who we are and how we live. In reality, human dignity is only respected when we understand that we are made by God, and in the image of God. When a trans person walks into our church, we see them as a human being, made by God, with eternal significance and worth. We are to treat everyone with civility and respect. Ultimately we respect them too much to go along with the lie of 'gender change'. But that doesn't mean we abandon basic courtesy.

Of course it would be wrong for a transsexual person to be denied a table at a restaurant, or a seat on a train. But there are situations where respect for others will mean that there has to be rightful discrimination. Respect for the privacy and dignity of women would mean, for example, that an airport security job involving female body searches should not be taken by a male to female transsexual. Partly due to The Christian Institute's campaign at the time of the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, churches do have some important protections. With regard to ministry, membership, and sacraments, churches should not be sued for discrimination for believing that it is not possible to truly change from one's birth sex.

## **C. Compassion and child protection**

God has put us here, in this culture, at this time, for such a time as this. We could refuse to engage with anyone with problems. But that is not Christ's way. He wept over Jerusalem. We should be grieving over the way that the minds of children and young people are being poisoned against God the Creator. We need to present the case for protecting children from medical interventions that are dangerous both physically and psychologically. It is claimed that in eighty per cent of cases, when children claim to be 'in the wrong body', if they are left alone, in time, they grow out of this desire (of course, the challenge remains as to how to help the twenty per cent of those do not). But many would maintain that to intervene medically is unnecessary and unwise.<sup>41</sup> Underage youngsters are not mature enough to make such momentous choices and decisions.

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<sup>40</sup> Mohler, Al, We Cannot Be Silent, 2015

<sup>41</sup> Paul McHugh, 'Transgender Surgery isn't the Solution', Wall Street Journal, 12 June 2014, [http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=OCC0QFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wsj.com%2Farticles%2Fpaul-mchugh-transgender-surgery-isnt-the-solution-1402615120&ei=sU10VYG\\_PLGd7gbC8ICwBQ&usg=AFQjCNEhVh8uS6M3rpC\\_dYCnkCOPZu-JcQ&sig2=COpAiFuRZEx60Zi6qHuK2A&bvm=bv.95039771,d.ZGU](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=OCC0QFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.wsj.com%2Farticles%2Fpaul-mchugh-transgender-surgery-isnt-the-solution-1402615120&ei=sU10VYG_PLGd7gbC8ICwBQ&usg=AFQjCNEhVh8uS6M3rpC_dYCnkCOPZu-JcQ&sig2=COpAiFuRZEx60Zi6qHuK2A&bvm=bv.95039771,d.ZGU), accessed 6 March 2016. For medical risks of hormone treatment see Phelan, James E, 'Dangers of Hormone Treatments', in Shick, D., ed., Understanding Gender Confusion, Help4Families, 2014, pp.20-24. See also the chapter 'Transgender Children' in Heyer, Walt, Paper Genders, pp.25-45. In 2015 the Tavistock and Portman Trust, reported a four-fold increase in children under ten reporting 'gender confusion.' In 2009-2010 there were 19 under-11s referred; in 2014-15 there were 77.

## Conclusion

The author of Ecclesiastes observed that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. The ancient heresy of Gnosticism regarded gender as fluid, and our first parent as androgynous. Satan has opposed truth from the beginning, but the darkness has never overcome the light. As the reformation wall in Geneva proclaims, *post tenebras lux* – light after darkness. We are living in a day when the fundamental truth 'male and female created he them' is denied. But ultimately, God's truth will prevail.

Sharon James

*We are thankful to Sharon James for providing us with this introduction to an important issue and would encourage readers to continue to think and read widely on this matter to gain a biblical understanding of the issues involved. Alongside her own list of further resources (next page) Affinity, in association with London Theological Seminary and the Evangelical Movement of Wales is hoping to hold a conference next year for church leaders and other interested parties in the south Wales region. We will be publicising this widely nearer the time but if you would like to be informed of this once the details are confirmed, please let us know ([office@affinity.org.uk](mailto:office@affinity.org.uk))*

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### Further Resources

The article deals with the cultural factors behind the increased acceptance of gender fluidity. For a medical perspective, refer to the Christian Medical Fellowship File, *Gender Dysphoria*, by Rick Thomas and Peter Saunders, Spring 2016.

#### Books

Heyer, Walt, *Paper Genders*, Make Waves Publishing, 2011

Heyer, Walt, *Kid Dakota and the Secret at Grandma's House*, 2015 (an autobiographical novel).

Mohler, Al, *We Cannot Be Silent*, Nelson, 2015

Shick, Denise, *Understanding Gender Confusion*, Help4Families Press, 2014

I have strong reservations about Mark Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (IVP US, 2015). Robert Gagnon provides a helpful review here: 'How should Christians respond to the Transgender phenomenon?' *First Things*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/09/how-should-christians-respond-to-the-transgender-phenomenon>

#### Articles

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McHugh, Paul, 'Transgender Surgery isn't the Solution', *Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 2014

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O'Leary, Dale; Sprigg, Peter, 'Understanding and Responding to the Transgender Movement', *Family Research Council Paper*, June 2015, [www.frc.org/transgender](http://www.frc.org/transgender)

O'Neill, Brendan, 'Thou Shalt not take Caitlin Jenner's Name in Vain', *Spiked Online*, 2015, <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/thou-shalt-not-take-caitlyn-jenners-name-in-vain/17036#.VXHgM9JViko>

O'Neill, Brendan, 'The Myth of Hate Speech', 17 February 2016, <http://brendanoneill.co.uk/post/139507336659/the-myth-of-hate-speech>

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The Southern Baptist Convention, in 2014 the SBC passed a set of resolutions on gender by Denny Burk and Andrew Walker:  
<https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjR1qvwwwTJAhUHXRQKH88CDgQFggrMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dennyburk.com%2Fsouthern-baptists-pass-resolution-on-transgender-sbc14%2F&usg=AFQjCNEmtD-8xdMJIDPOipNZwosfx6TaA>

Thomas, Rick, Saunders, Peter, 'Gender Dysphoria', *CMF Files No. 59*, Spring 2016

### **Websites**

*Dirt from Dirt*, Lesbian website opposed to transgender ideology. Their *Handbook for parents of 'transgender' children* includes a short history of the transgender movement; how the 'fad' is spreading among youngsters, and how to respond,

<http://dirtywhiteboi67.blogspot.com/2015/08/transgender-handbook-for-concerned.html>

*Ensuring Fairness*, 'Transgenderism and Children',

<https://ensuringfairness.wordpress.com/resources.../transgenderism-children> (accessed 28 April 2016)

*Help For Families*, Christian support groups for parents based in the US, <http://help4families.com/>

*Parakaleo*, evangelical Christian agency founded by Keith Tiller, [www.parakaleo.co.uk/](http://www.parakaleo.co.uk/)

*Sex Change Regret*, [www.sexchangeregret.com/](http://www.sexchangeregret.com/) a website for support of those who have transitioned and later regret it.

*The Christian Institute*, [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk). You can contact The Christian Institute for advice regarding the law on transsexual issues.

*Transgender Trend*, a non-Christian group supporting transition back to birth sex, [www.transgendertrend.com](http://www.transgendertrend.com)

### **Video clips**

Washington students interviewed about identity:

<http://christiannews.net/2016/04/16/video-college-students-poll-ed-on-identity-agree-short-white-man-can-identify-as-tall-chinese-woman/>

Women's safe spaces no longer protected:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzwMJAFWLtQ&feature=youtu.be>

### **What is going into some schools**

NHS/Gendered Intelligence, A Guide for young trans people in the UK (2007),

<http://cdn0.genderedintelligence.co.uk/2012/11/17/17-15-02-A-Guide-For-Young-People.pdf>

Stonewall, Getting Started: A toolkit for preventing and tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in primary schools.

[http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting\\_started\\_toolkit\\_-\\_primary.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting_started_toolkit_-_primary.pdf)

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<http://cdn0.genderedintelligence.co.uk/2012/11/17/17-14-04-GI-sexual-health-booklet.pdf>