

Christian beliefs on transsexualism

Transsexuals are people who are biologically normal, but who believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex – they say they are ‘trapped in the wrong body’. And so a male-to-female transsexual will assume the identity of a woman. Often transsexuals undergo a ‘sex change’ operation. The Gender Recognition Bill provides many legal rights for transsexuals.

Three fundamental premises lie behind the Bill: *one*, human psychological states rather than human bodily nature can determine a person’s gender; *two*, it is right for a surgeon to deform a healthy body in the interests of a psychological disorder; and, *three*, the State should validate psychosocial confusions having precedence over unambiguous biological sex. Christians say these premises are wrong from biblical teaching, and also church tradition and common sense reason. *First*, the Bible teaches that a human person is a mind-body whole. So the body determines personhood, not just the mind.

The first Christian heresy was to deny that “Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh*” (1 John 4.2). Genesis 1:27 records: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Biblical Christians hold that ‘sex change’ surgery desecrates a body made in the image of God. And the Bible teaches that the State should validate what is right and not what is wrong (Romans 13.3).

Secondly, the Church of England’s 2003 discussion document also equated transsexualism with the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.¹ Both see the body as unimportant and the mind as all important. Gnosticism was strongly condemned by early Christian theologians such as Irenaeus (c 130 -200 AD) and Tertullian (c 155 -220 AD).² *Thirdly*, the philosopher, Sir Peter Strawson, also holds that a person must have “*both* states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics... [so] the orthodox have wisely insisted on the resurrection of the body”³. It is therefore wrong to determine a person’s gender because their mind cannot accept their body. As the Bishop of Winchester

has stated: “When the bill passes into law, for me the words woman and man will no longer mean what they have always meant and the government will have introduced marriage between two people of the same sex.”⁴

Churches try to care for transsexuals and to speak to them about the Gospel. The Christian response to a transsexual, as with any other person, should be prayer, care and counsel as for any with psychological difficulties and where necessary repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). There will, of course, be differences in the pastoral approaches that are taken. However, when it comes to deciding who should join ladies’ prayer meetings or be leaders, who should use the ladies’ lavatories or take Holy Communion, surely individual churches should have the freedom to decide this themselves? Surely the law should not leave churches wide-open to legal actions in secular courts over such matters?

The theologian Oliver O’Donovan (Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford) has argued: “If I claim to have a ‘real sex’, which may be at war with the sex of my body and is at least in a rather uncertain relationship to it, I am shrinking from the glad acceptance of myself as a physical as well as a spiritual being, and seeking self-knowledge in a kind of Gnostic withdrawal from material creation.”⁵

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¹ *Some Issues in Human Sexuality – A Guide to the Debate*, discussion document from the House of Bishops’ Group on Issues in Human Sexuality, Church House, 2003, page 249

² Berkhof, L, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, The Banner of Truth Trust, latest edition 2002, pages 45 -51 and 62-63; Elwell, W A (Ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Paternoster Press, 1999, pages 444-447, 569 and 1078 -1079

³ Strawson, P F, *Individuals – An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen, 1959, pages 104, 116

⁴ *The Sunday Times*, 29 February 2004

⁵ O’Donovan, O, *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage*, Grove Booklet on Ethics, 1982, page 11