

The theological and practical implications of the new and emerging transgender theology

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Dissertation accepted in fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree *Masters of Theology* in *Ethics* at the North-West
University

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Graduation ceremony: December 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Fruitful research, even when carried out by a single individual, remains dependent on many people during the process. I am incredibly grateful to Prof. Brian Talbot, whose patience has been exemplary. Prof. Talbot's encouragement to stay the course and finish the task has been the main reason, under God, that this research came to completion. His insight and ability to help me get unstuck at key points cleared the way for continued momentum. Peg Evans has been the gentle and almost motherly voice of encouragement who did everything possible to ensure I continued in this research. Tiene Buys has been the complementary tougher edge that has kept me from complacency and procrastination. Prof. Johnson has provided valuable encouragement and timely insight. Hester Lombard employed her librarian skills with diligence and skill that left me not only grateful but in awe! I have needed this team, and the Lord knows I could not have done it without them.

I am grateful for private discussions and the written work of Prof. Wayne Grudem, who proved invaluable in the area of eternal subordination. Dr Andrew Hutchinson, a close friend, provided the example I needed to persevere in the midst of challenging life circumstances. Of course, the graciousness and patience of my wife, Katrina Allin, in allowing me to be absent from family times for hours on end and to do so with encouragement, has been an indescribable gift.

Thank you.

ABSTRACT

This research considers the scope and effect of transgender theology. It is not an evaluation, as such, of transgender ideology in general but specifically as it is encountered in the Church through theological formulation. The investigative scope includes the doctrine of God, His nature and the language used in the Scriptures to describe Him. This forms the backbone of the research and clears the ground to ask what it means to be made in the image of God. Questions of the hierarchy within the Trinity bear great relevance as applied by transgender authors to the disruption of hierarchy within gender. Christology, and in particular, the implications of the virgin birth to the gender of Christ, and whether His breaking of societal norms placed Him on the transgender spectrum were also primary considerations. This research also considers the approach to Scripture taken by authors who support the transgender experience. Surrounding these pivotal areas of research are the consideration of secondary passages of Scripture used to support and give examples of non-binary individuals within the biblical canon.

This is a literature-based study that considers the ethical and theological implications of transgenderism through surveying and engaging with relevant printed and online works. Evaluation is from within an conservative, evangelical framework. Attention has been given to the plausibility structures that have evolved, particularly through the sexual revolution in the west, that have led to the formulation and acceptance of transgender theology.

The research discovered that this is an issue of first importance, a gospel issue that has profound effects on the church at large and individuals. However, before it becomes an issue of the effect on people, it is first an issue of worship given how God is understood, formulated and worshipped. The majority of authors surveyed who support transgender theology take a liberal or at least a much-less-than evangelical approach to Scripture. The reformation principles of sola scriptura (Scripture alone) and the analogy of scripture (Scripture interpreting Scripture) are often absent. The desire to see the person of God, including Christ, as transgender cannot bare the weight of Scripture and is dismissed. This is also true for the disruption of the hierarchy in gender based on the

eternal relationships within the Trinity. Secondary examples of non-binary people within the Scriptures also do not hold up to rigorous exegesis.

In looking at the plausibility structures stemming from the sexual revolution that enabled transgender theology, the research pointed the way forward to more robust methods of discipleship. These methods of discipleship take into account the powerful effects of secularism, emotionalism, therapeutic individualism, and radical feminism. It must be noted that the scope of the research only allows for a signpost for discipleship rather than detailed exploration. Key to the findings is the nature of personhood and identity that, for the Christian, must come from union with Christ rather than a person's gender.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current gap in knowledge in the area of transgender theology exists both in evaluating the arguments to discover the approach to Scripture that has been adopted and their exegetical and theological validity. This evaluation enables the gaps to be filled at the local church level in terms of pastoral and discipleship considerations. What and how do you teach the church?

1.2 BACKGROUND

The proposed title of the research aims to get at the heart of emerging transgender theology in order to address the formidable challenge confronting the church from within the church. The objective is to provide an evangelical evaluation and response that enables Christians to live faithfully as the latest phase of the sexual revolution establishes itself.

It is taken for granted within the evangelical movement that the ethics and morality of society will often be in tension and contradiction to biblical morality. The doctrine of sin prepares the Christian for such disagreement and recognises that only a regenerated human being will fully share the morality of the Scriptures. Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, tells us that such regeneration is a miraculous, pneumatological event and is part of a complex event that includes personal faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

However, there are significant pressures that have come to bear on the church that would make otherwise scripturally clear issues appear vague and open to interpretations wider than normal hermeneutical practice. Not least of such pressures is a society that accepts as normal that gender may be fluid and a person may have many potential identities. Militant lobby and pressure groups like Stonewall have a pervasive influence on many aspects of government policy, affecting areas like education and family life. The media, which is mainly liberal, consistently presents positive images and

¹ The doctrine of sin states that human beings have a sinful nature (Gal. 5v7) and that all people sin (Rom. 3v23) and that the human heart is corrupt (Jer 17v9), and sin comes from the heart (Matt. 15v19)

² Pressures on the church come from groups like Stonewall, from the government, and from society in general.

stories of transgenderism while painting dissenters as myopic and bigoted. These twin pressures cannot be underestimated in terms of the emotional and psychological pressure on Christians and churches. The implications for our understanding and submission to the Bible as the authoritative word of God are far-reaching. Conversely, there have been times in history when scientific discoveries about the universe have forced the church not to question scriptural authority but their understanding and interpretation of it. Is transgenderism in this category?

The visible church also consists of more than just the evangelical movement. Liberal Anglican churches have been early adopters of transgender ideology, along with those who would be described as neo-evangelical and emergent churches. We are now at the stage in this transgender revolution where professing Christians who have adopted the same, are formulating expressions of theology. These formulations often appear as popular level books aimed to increase acceptance of the new gender theology across the spectrum of the church. If the new gender theology is exegetically wrong, then it becomes an issue of first importance potentially affecting individual salvation. If the new theology is biblically faithful, then the church has been guilty of a great sin in not affording transgender people membership into the church. In both cases, thorough evaluation and response are needed.

Problem Statement

The Church in the UK, and indeed the Western world, has been confronted with a sudden and climactic change, not just to the ethical context in which we live in society but now also within the church itself. The new gender ideology, where people may identify as the opposite sex, A-sexual, and non-binary splitting off into over 90 identifications, has far-reaching implications for the church. Christians are confused because of legal changes, mainstream media, pressure groups and indeed knowing people who do not identify with their birth sex. There appears to be a lack of clarity about the biblical position and perhaps a reluctance to deal with such a contentious subject.

³ The term “first importance” is used in 1 Corinthians 15 to describe key gospel issues. It is taken up and used in general evangelical circles as an umbrella for issues that are necessary for salvation.

Related problems include the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and the danger of emotional arguments undermining such biblical commitments. Or, potentially, confusing a strong stand on biblical authority with historical evangelical tradition on sexuality. Research needs to consider,

- The position on biblical authority of those who hold to the new gender ideology.
- The hermeneutical and exegetical approaches taken and their validity.
- Epistemology as it relates to Christians and their convictions about truth and its sources.
- Pastoral and discipleship considerations that take into account the reasons why Christians embrace the new gender ideology that is not based on Scriptural authority.

Main Research Question

Does the new gender theology have validity, and how should the evangelical Church respond?

Sub-questions

1. What is the new transgender theology, and why is the church compelled to address it?
2. Why is this new theology so influential at the present time?
3. What are the theological and ethical implications that need to be addressed?
4. Is the new transgender theology hermeneutically and exegetically valid?
5. Within a Christian ethical framework, what practical theological guidance can be offered for more effective spiritual formation in the church today?

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the research are to understand how the new gender ideology became a theological issue and problem within the Church. To then

understand the validity of this new theology and formulate robust and compassionate responses.

1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The central theoretical argument of this research is that an evangelical approach to hermeneutics and exegesis will conclude whether the new gender theology is valid. If it is not valid, then the reasons why it is not valid will form a robust response that is faithful to Scripture and compassionate toward those who suffer from gender dysphoria. Conversely, if the new theological arguments are valid, then a new understanding of Scripture and its practice will be ascertained. These responses will enable and facilitate discipleship and pastoral care within the church in the area of gender. It is anticipated that the research and conclusions will have three main outcomes.

1. The questions around hermeneutics and exposition of relevant passages will clarify our understanding of a biblical worldview in relation to gender.
2. Hermeneutical and exegetical studies will enable a fresh commitment in the conclusions to an evangelical view of Scripture, which brings a clarion reformational call to the Church.
- 3 Responses in discipleship to repair foundations and equip the church at pew level to live faithfully and compassionately.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

We will adopt the Osmer methodology in our research as this will provide a good interpretive framework to compare and contrast case studies from different perspectives. Osmer (2008:4) is preferred because it uses four key stages to research, the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task.

Descriptive-Empirical Task

This will involve quantitative research in order to gain a wide perspective on the problem itself of the new gender theology within the church. What is happening? What are the implications of what is happening? It will involve a literature-based review of the

emerging material and books on gender theology. It will also look at which sections of the church are supporting the new theology. The goal as Osmer explains it is to “describe what is going on in the specific situation, episode or context” (2008:4). Osmer continues “to show that the gathered information helps us discern patterns, dynamics, perspectives, and feelings as well as meanings attached to these, which all place the actions taking place in a longer narrative framework” (2008:5-6). In other words, this task enables us to gain a clear grasp of the current situation and its constituent components.

The Interpretive Task

The interpretive task will seek to answer the question, why is this happening? Or, as Osmer puts it, “why is this going on?” (2008:4). What are the cultural, philosophical, ideological, and pragmatic causes of the new gender theology? Why now? Literature will be reviewed and evaluated in order to establish preliminary markers for theological reflection and response. The interpretive task will seek to understand the hermeneutical and exegetical rationale for the new gender theology. Theological considerations will include ethics and how they are derived biblically. The goal of this task is to construct theories of why and how transgender theology is now being widely received. Osmer highlights this, “Theories help us understand and explain certain features of an episode, or context” (2008:80)

The Normative Task

This will involve establishing norms for sexual identity and expression within a biblical worldview. We will engage with literature that both seek to establish transgenderism as an ethical norm and literature that challenge the new gender theology and evaluate exegetical validity. What are biblical ethical norms in the area of gender? The normative task will help to establish ethical norms that Christians should hold and how to live as faithful disciples of Christ. Osmer describes this endeavour as “constructing ethical norms to guide our responses and learning from good practice.” (2008:4).

Through theological reflection and the consideration of historical methods of discipleship under which the church has flourished, an evaluation will be made of modern discipleship trends as a potential cause for confusion in gender theology.

The Pragmatic Task

The pragmatic task asks the question, how might we respond? The results of the three prior stages of research will clear the way for conclusions and recommendations. Areas for the pragmatic task include the church's view of Scripture, biblical ethics in the area of gender, and application in pastoral and discipleship contexts. This task focuses on "strategies and actions that are undertaken to shape events towards desired goals" (Osmer 2008:10) These findings, strategies and actions will provide needed theological course corrections pointing towards practical strategies in discipleship.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

Some new books have come to the market seeking to provide a biblical rationale for transgenderism. There are fewer from the evangelical side that engage with these authors. Perhaps the lack of evangelical response has been due to not wanting to give gender ideology too much oxygen and exposure. There is certainly a case for not seeking to answer every issue that comes up as many issues are short-lived. However, that is not the case with the new transgender theology when it has widespread societal approval and increasing support within the Church. The following books will form the bedrock of our research.

Chris Paige is influential in the wider church as the executive director of Transfaith. Paige's main written contribution, *Other Wise Christian* (2019) has been put forward as a "guidebook for transgender liberation" within the church. The book is written not primarily to persuade evangelical Christians of her position but as a "self-defence manual for abused Christians" (Paige 2019: 35). By "abused Christians", Paige is referring to Christians who identify as transgender who need a biblical defence for themselves towards other Christians who would disagree with transgenderism. Paige asserts, "Christianity is particularly known for casting judgment and condemnation" (2019: xviii). Paige puts a lot of emphasis on the need for community, and by that, she means the transgender community within the church because of such judgment and condemnation. As well as paying tribute and tracking the trailblazers for gender

⁴ Transfaith is an organisation that is led by transgender people to support transgender people of faith. They seek to work on strategy to enhance acceptance of transgenderism within the Church. Transfaith. (n.d.). *Transfaith*. [online] Available at: <https://transfaith.info> [Accessed 06 Jan. 2022].

theology, Paige's line of enquiry covers biblical eunuchs (2019:49-85), creation (2019:17-31), Jewish tradition (2019:89-113), and various passage such as Deuteronomy 22:5 and Galatians 3:28. In a way that is well-aligned with intersectionality, Paige also seeks to highlight the oppressive role of white colonialism which deserves attention.

What does God think? (Evans, 2017) seeks to bring wider scientific and cultural arguments to bear on the interpretation of Scripture. Evans seeks to make a distinction between blind faith and true faith (2017: 65-78). This appears to be an attempt to modify the Anglican hermeneutic of Scripture, tradition and reason, and transform it into Scripture, science and culture. In a chapter entitled: "*What does God think?*", Evans asks if God's command to love your neighbour as yourself has been annexed *with* "unless you don't like them" (2017:135). The charge is that many Christians and/or the Church as a whole only love people with whom they agree. How much of this charge holds true and whether the real issue is that disagreement is seen as a lack of love is an area to be explored.

A more robust theological defence of transgenderism is provided by Justin Sabia-Tanis, whose academic credentials and intellectual prowess has produced one of the most detailed exegetical works, *Trans-Gender* (2018). Chapter three, addresses "*Gender variance and the scriptures*" and makes up the backbone of the exegetical arguments for the validity of transgenderism for individuals. An ontological backdrop is provided in chapter two, "*A search for ourselves*", which examines such a search through Childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:24-37). Sabia-Tanis also challenges traditional concepts like the gender of God (2018: 183), the nature of the relationship between body and spirit (2018:183), and trans-Christology (2018:138). This area requires careful investigation into the nature of personhood being put forward and how that differs from an evangelical understanding. Of course, this goes further than the nature of gender within Christians and touches on issues of worship and God. Right worship only comes from worshipping God as He reveals Himself and not as we wish to conceptualise Him. This has profound ramifications for the Church. Once the case is established, Sabia-Tanis moves on to what it would look like for Trans people to be included in Church, and the barriers and signs of a "welcoming community" (2018:115-221).

Kathy Baldock in, *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon* (2014), claims to show the historical, cultural, psychological, medical, social and religious lenses through which LGBTQ+ people have been viewed. Part 4 looks at same-sex behaviour in the Bible and families in the Bible (Baldock, 2014: 221-247). It is argued that the Bible's original language did not include the word homosexuality and references Jewish writings and historians of the era to reframe the 'sin of Sodom.' In chapter 5 Baldock looks at the damage done to LGBTQ+ Christians through evangelicals trying to "fix them" (2014:283) and then considers what would make the church a safe place for LGBTQ+ people (2014:397) Baldock's treatment of the subject raises a fundamental question of, 'what is a Christian?' The answer is assumed by Baldock but requires investigation.

Beyond a Binary God (Soughers, 2018) seeks to present a theology for transgender allies. Soughers considers the need for a transgender theology (2018:23-44), and then seeks to elaborate on such a theology, looking at being made in the likeness and image of God and Trinitarian theology (2018:45-96). Once again, this approach challenges the evangelical view of God Himself and therefore involves an issue of the right worship of God and a person's understanding of their core identity.

A comprehensive response to transgenderism is seen in *The New Normal* (Nolland, 2018). Eleven authors tackle different questions about the transgender movement and how Christians should understand and respond to it. Chapter one helpfully outlines a theological approach that "Western Christians should take regarding transgender issues in relation to children" (Nolland, 2018:13-34). Most of the book addresses responses to society at large and not within the church and, therefore, will be outside our remit. However, those responses include an area aimed at Christian parents whose child says they identify as transgender and equipping Christian youth for the new context. These include theological reflections and arguments that will be useful in our research. Chapter 10 covers "*The Bible and the Rainbow*" in an exploration of typology and its effects on Christians, which will also be pertinent.

Holy Sexuality (Yuan, 2019), whilst not directly discussing transgender ideology and theology, does present a case for biblical sexuality. If it can be shown that changing your sexual identity does not just lack biblical warrant but is sinful, it has implications for the situation where you have two men in a relationship, but one identifies as female. If

that is not biblically supportable, then Yuan provides fruitful exegetical studies that indeed impinge on transgender theology.

Vaughn Roberts, who himself identifies as same-sex attracted, writes in *Transgender* (2016) from a conservative evangelical position. Roberts views the subject through the lens of the gospel categories of creation, fall and rescue (2016:35-55). Roberts then looks at the wisest ways of approaching the subject with transgender people. Roberts's approach presents the bedrock of an evangelical position, locating transgender issues ultimately in humanity's fall and the hope of redemption through Christ.

In *The Plausibility Problem* (Shaw, 2015), Ed Shaw examines issues like "Your identity is your sexuality" (2015: 35), "if it makes you happy, it must be right" (Shaw, 2015: 62), "men and women are equal and interchangeable" (2015:81). These philosophical and ontological considerations will provide fruitful research on presuppositions that lie behind theological arguments. This is a crucial area that deals with why specific approaches are taken in theological arguments and, indeed, in the approach to Scripture itself. If your identity is indeed equated with sexuality, then it would be true that to disagree with a person's assumed gender identity would be to reject that individual and have no way forward. However, if identity is not primarily sexuality, there is scope to recast the arguments in ways that allow forward momentum in the lives of Christians.

Finally, in *The Rise of the Modern Self* (Trueman, 2020) provides extensive and detailed explorations of how the issues of gender identity have come about in a way that society as a whole accepts. The rightness or wrongness of that societal development has much to say about the validity of the results and whether the Church is misreading Scripture. Proposed ways forward are also provided, which will require examining.

1.6 FORMULATION

In formulating a response, we will need to understand what has influenced some parts of the Church to affirm transgenderism. We will need to understand their approach to Scripture regarding its authority and interpretation. What philosophical approach is taken to the concept of truth? We will look at why the issue is important for today's Church. What are the implications of adopting the new theology? Engaging with literature that disagrees with traditional evangelical theology in the ethical area of

gender will form the backbone of our research. The focus in our formulation will be on the validity, or lack thereof, of exegetical arguments for and against the new gender theology.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study of the sexual revolution, in gender identity in the Western world and its effects on the Church is a literature-based study and involves minimal risk. We will not be conducting interviews but rather engaging with existing literature that describes the quantitative elements of our research. For example, what shape and form do current gender identities take? What social changes and pressures have enabled the widespread acceptance of these gender identities, theologically? How have Christians responded? What exegetical, theological and pastoral philosophies underpin the new gender theology?

1.8 KEY WORDS

Gender Identity

This refers to how a person identifies his/her own gender in psychological terms in contrast to their biological sex.

Intersectionality

Referring to the theory that the overlap of social identities like gender, race and class reveals systemic oppression in society.

Transsexualism

Referring to the desire of an individual to change their primary and secondary physical characteristics that do not conform to their psychological gender identity.

Culture Wars

Referring to the struggle between societal groups for their beliefs, values and practices to determine what is to be normative and acceptable.

Epistemology

Referring to how knowledge is attained and how what is a justifiable belief rather than opinion can be determined.

Discipleship

The formation of Christians into the image of Christ in their beliefs, character and practices.

Hermeneutics

Established principles and methods for interpreting literary texts, especially the Bible.

Exegesis

The critical explanation or interpretation of a text of Scripture arrived at by studying the text and its context to arrive at authorial intent.

Eisegesis

Bringing the meaning to a text from outside of it. The opposite of Exegesis.

Transgender theology represents a significant challenge to the Christian Church. It calls into question our understanding of God himself, the nature of self and our personhood, discipleship and our relationship with Scripture. We will begin our research by surveying the extent of transgender affirmation within the church, summarise the main aspects of transgender theology, and consider its implications.

CHAPTER 2:

TRANSGENDER THEOLOGY

We begin our research by summarising current transgender theology and then considering the most serious implications.

2.1 EUNUCHS AND INCLUSION

Chalke asks the question, “So where do we, as the church, begin in all this?” He then continues, “I believe the key is to explore a theology of transgender inclusion and flourishing. And this, I suggest, should start with the ground-breaking story from the Acts of the Apostles of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8v26-39); a controversial pre-cursor to all that is to come.” (Chalke, 2018:12) Commentators agree, Chalke states, that this Eunuch was a man who had his testicles removed and that, in Jewish eyes, this was shocking. The Eunuch was a non-Jew, and Deuteronomy 23:1 states:

No man whose sex organs have been crushed or cut can join in worship with the Lord’s people.

Chalke concludes, “It is therefore of dramatic significance that Philip commits to the radical course of action of baptising this Ethiopian Eunuch” (2018:14) However, Chalke does go on to state that he is not suggesting that a first-century Eunuch is the exact equivalent of a 21st-century trans or intersex person because “the story doesn’t really go to the question of gender identity as such” Instead it is “an example of the principle of radical inclusion as central to their mission and purpose” (Chalke, 2018:14) And “the point is this. Before the theological questions have even surfaced – let alone been debated and resolved – Philip goes out on a limb. Why? Finding himself in this unprecedented situation, he can only be guided by his understanding of the teaching and example of Jesus – through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” (Chalke, 2018:15).

Chalke goes on to ask why the author of Acts chose to include it at such an early stage of the Acts narrative. Chalke believes this is evidence that Philip did not make a mistake but instead was held up as a foundational example for the mission at hand in Acts and in line with the teaching of Jesus. Getting to what Chalke calls the most “extraordinary dimension of this story.”, he implies the encounter is the most impactful part of Philip’s own conversion story. “What is really going on here is no less than Philip’s conversion in the face of his encounter with this sexual/physical/masculine

‘other’” (Chalke, 2018:15). Chalke does not seem to be talking about Philip’s actual spiritual conversion but his grappling and change of mind or forming of a theology of this radical inclusion. This change of mind is so paradigm-shifting that Chalke talks of it as Philip’s conversion. Chalke anticipates Philip believing that the prophecy of Isaiah 56 is being fulfilled:

For thus says the Lord. To the Eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

Based on Acts 8 and the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, Chalke concludes with lessons for the 21st-century church:

The church has much to learn from those it considers to be outsiders. It is through opening ourselves up to those who are on the margins – through engaging with them and taking time to listen to their voices and stories – that we discover who we are. So it is that the first fully gentile convert to Christianity is not only a dark-skinned African but also from a sexual/gender minority. The call to the 21st-century church could not be clearer; it is a call to be radically inclusive and welcoming (Chalke, 2018:14-15).

Chalke quotes David Smith⁵, “The very survival of Christianity ...depends upon the emergence of men and women able to think new thoughts and devise new strategies at the real frontiers of mission today” (Chalke, 2018:21). Chalke sees his conclusions as existential for the church.

Other authors have more to add to the relevance of Eunuchs to transgender theology; however, at this stage, we are merely noting the contours of the terrain.

2.2 CREATION AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Chalke begins with a question, “Firstly, we must ask, what does it mean to be made in the image of God?” (Chalke, 2018:19). Chalke notes that God is Spirit and has no physical body parts and states that the Scriptures are insistent and “describe God as both male and female rather than either/or.” And concludes that “whatever Imago Dei implies, it is not about hormones and chromosomes, or the binary nature of humanity”

⁵ Smith is a conservative evangelical. It must not be assumed that he supports Chalke’s views on transgender theology.

(Chalke, 2018:19). It seems that Chalke discounts any relevance in the discussion of man-made in the image of God and the transgender questions.

On the now challenged binary nature of humanity, Chalke states that Genesis 1 also has binary descriptions of earth and sea, day and night, plants and animals. “However, God also creates the beautiful ‘half-ways’ of lakes and rivers, dawns and dusks. Or what of the ambiguities of Sea Anemones, which are like underwater plants but have long been classified genetically as part animal and part plant?” (Chalke, 2018:19). Chalke implies that while Genesis One has a binary description of mankind, there are also ‘half-ways’ of non-binary people in God’s good creation and order. In driving the point home, Chalke alludes to Wrasse fish that sometimes switch gender permanently while other Asian Sheepshead Wrasse remain female for their entire lives. Chalke states, “Gender transition is clearly not a western fad” (2018:19). He continues, “and what of babies who are born intersex – people whose genitalia, chromosomes or hormones do not fit the typical definition for male or female bodies. Are they not in God’s image? To suggest any less is a crime against all Scripture. God affirms the original goodness of all humanity” (Chalke, 2018:19).

Chalke’s target conclusion is that although male and female are the norms, it does not mean that being intersex or trans is somehow inferior. “The norm does not equate to ideal, but simply to most common” (2018:19). At this stage, Chalke rejects any moral implications of being transgender, equating it to people who have differing hair colours. “This does not mean that it is sinful or subversion, a disorder, or less than God intended” (Chalke, 2018:20).

It is unclear how Chalke sees the Genesis account of male and female in terms of the relationship between sex and gender.

In Genesis 2, Sabia-Tanis sees the possibility *that* “from a single androgynous being come two types of being. More than one created being can come from the earth creature. The earth-creature became a woman and a man when God removed a part of it and fashioned it into a whole. We know that human foetuses can create either (or both) sets of genitals in the womb... From that bit of human tissue, a child of either sex will emerge. We could read this passage as opening up the possibilities of gender. If completeness comes from having both male and female, then a person who possessed

both is a return to the original completion in the earth creature.” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:61). Sabia-Tanis quotes Mollenkott:

Ironically, there is a traditional method of reading Genesis 1-2 that provides a stronger sanction for Omni gender than for the binary gender construct. When this hermaphroditic earthling is later placed under a deep sleep, he/she is divided into the human male and female. From this angle, hermaphrodites or intersexuals could be viewed as reminders of original perfection (Mollenkott, 2001:91).

The ‘earth creature’ seems to refer to Adam before the creation of Eve and that the creation of Eve was also the creation of Adam as distinctly male.

2.3 THE NATURE OF GOD

Sabia-Tanis explores and seeks to elaborate on the meaning of being made in God's image by looking at God's nature, which he describes as both male and female and even on a gender spectrum. This explains, according to Sabia-Tanis, why Adam or the earth creature is both male and female and, therefore, why transgender people, rather than marring the image of God, present a closer representation of it (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:55-61).

This assertion regarding the nature of God comes from the plural “let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). “ ... while most of us in the Jewish and Christian tradition have taught that God is exclusively male, Genesis 1 clearly states that God encompasses both male and female since both women and men are made in the image of God.” He notes that *The New Interpreters Bible* affirms that “both male and female are so created that the female images the divine as much as the male” (Sabia-Tanis 2018: 56)). Sabia-Tanis, therefore, suggests that the plural pronoun used for God in Genesis 1v28 refers to the plurality of God's own being in Gender – “male, female, and beyond” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:57), favourably quoting Holly Boswell as concluding “Adam mirrored an Androgynous God before the split into Eve” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:57). Pronouns are, of course, an essential aspect of transgender personhood and self-identity. This seems to be undergirded and justified at this point by the plural pronoun used in Genesis 1 for God.

It is important to note that Sabia-Tanis sees this view of God as being more “biblically accurate” than the traditional view of God as male, rather than being a novel or liberal interpretation (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:137).

Unlike Mollenkott and Kessell, Sabia-Tanis does not see Jesus as transgender and as being born female as a result of parthenogenesis; he instead sees Jesus as a “transgressor of society’s gender boundaries” (2018:139). However, he does seem to suggest that Jesus would have cross-dressed if he had been transgender and uses this suggestion to help cross-dressers today see themselves in a relationship with Jesus. (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:13). Sabia-Tanis goes on to draw parallels between the persecution and suffering of transgender people with the suffering and persecution of Jesus Himself. The conception of Christ within a transgender concept seems more blurred than intimated above when Sabia-Tanis quotes Goss approvingly as saying, “Jesus the Christ is a liminal figure, and queer postmodern representational strategies reclaim the sexuality of Jesus/Christ and play with fluid gender constructions intersected with diverse sexual attractions.” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:141). Sabia-Tanis concludes, “Just as we need to free ourselves from our rigid gender constructs, so too do we need to free Christ from our limited and limiting understanding of Christ. By re-articulating Christ, we are able to see ourselves in Christ and Christ within ourselves” (2018:141).

At a minimum, Sabia-Tanis puts Jesus on the Queer spectrum because of his transgressing of societal gender norms in his treatment of others. He leaves the possibility that Jesus Himself was intersexual but says we cannot know (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:141). Furthermore, embracing our spectrum of gender after baptism is seen as akin to Jesus transitioning through his life as He is changed by the people He meets and through his death and resurrection (Sabia-Tanis 2018:141-143). Applying and intimating modern transgender language to Christ brings a vagueness as to whether Sabia-Tanis is seeking to conform Christ to modern transgenderism or a lesser goal of making Christ more relatable to transgender people. Both seem to be inferred. Soughers makes much of wisdom being seen as female (Sophia) and wisdom in the Bible being the person of Christ, at least pre-incarnate (2018:26-27).

The theme of resurrection is applied to sexual reassignment surgery and is seen as a participation in Christ’s resurrection (Soughers, 2018:142). Soughers does bring a note of caution not in terms of Christology but in terms of the need to “kill part of ourselves in

order to become new” (Soughers, 2018:142) This is a reference to transition surgery. Nevertheless, Christ’s resurrection is at least a paradigm for embracing the transgender experience. “Jesus’ body was changed, both by becoming alive after death and in ways that made Him appear different to those who knew Him; at the same time, He was the same Jesus who had been among them” (Soughers, 2018:142).

A key theme in the transgender conception of God seems to be of God’s changing and spectrum-ed nature. “If the creation is made in the image of God, then the constantly changing nature of the universe, with its swirling atoms and continually dying and resurrecting forms, reflects God’s changing nature” (Soughers, 2018:183). This is tempered with the following statement that God is “constant and enduring.” (ibid) Nevertheless, the theme is clear.

In conservative circles and feminist theology, there is current pushback on the idea of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. This is picked up by Soughers (2018:79-80) by way of challenging the order in which the Trinity is studied. Beginning with the Father in conservative theologies is replaced by starting with the Holy Spirit. She asks, “how then does giving priority to the Holy Spirit disrupt gender binary?” (Sougher,s 2018:81) Soughers answers, “By giving the Spirit the equal voice with the Father and the Son, it disrupts that binary, reminding us that the heart of God is one and three, but never two, challenging all binaries.” Along with Coakly (Coakley, 2013:154), Soughers sees prayer through the Spirit as something that challenges and disrupts the idea of a gender binary. However, Coakley's insistence on keeping gender within the godhead finds stiff resistance from Soughers (2018:82).

2.4 PERSONHOOD AND IDENTITY

We have considered the transgender view of being made in the image of God. However, it is essential to explore and discover the view of personhood and self-concept in more depth to grasp this aspect of transgender theology fully. “The search for an authentic self is a primary feature in the journey of the transgendered” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:24). Sabia-Tanis is opposed to the idea of a person being trapped inside the wrong body. Such a proposition, Sabia-Tanis insists, sets up a false dualism between body and soul (2018:161). In saying this, he recognises and adopts the idea that our bodies are integral to who we are as people. It is noted that many transgender

people still use the language of being in the “wrong body”, but this is more descriptive of a feeling than a theological position in the emerging transgender theology, it seems. Sabia-Tanis is keen to distance transgender people from the idea of victimhood that comes with “trapped” terminology. At the same time, there is recognition that the normal transgender experience is to feel some incongruity between a person’s body or gender assigned at birth because of biology and a person's sense of self (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:162). O’Donovan writes,

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. Transsexuals do not retreat from their bodies into a gnostic spirituality; if anything, they are preoccupied with them (O’Donovan, 1983:147).

How these assertions cohere with the incongruity previously mentioned above will need more examination later. There is a tension here.

Sabia-Tanis identifies three aspects of transgender body theology: revelation, unity of self and body, and the right to bodily self-determination. (2018:165). By revelation, he means that our bodies are made in the image of God, and therefore, our bodies bring a revelation to the world about God and who He is. The uniqueness of the transgender experience means “we can know unique aspects of God’s being and speak a distinct word of God to the world” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:164). In saying this, he believes that transgender people bring a revelation of God that non-transgender people do not. This is a significant claim. Ochs adds to this self-awareness “In opening up to creation, we must also be open to examining our own creativity. We are not simply created we seem to be co-creators in forming and transforming our self” (Ochs, 1994:5). We will explore and evaluate these important ideas in subsequent chapters.

In terms of the unity of self and body, the goal that Sabia-Tanis is pursuing is for transgender people of faith to love and accept their bodies as who they are as a person. Sabia-Tanis talks of his own transitioning and how through it he grew to love his body more and more. At this point, we seem to butt up against the same previous tension. Your body is you, love your body as yourself, but it’s fine to change your body to fit how

you feel inside. There is a body fluidity as well as a sensed gender fluidity that can be embraced without denying that you are your body. There is no concept here of the soul being gendered in a way that is different to the body, which again is of note. Importing what we have previously noticed about transgender theology of God Himself as possessing a gender spectrum and fluidity, it seems that altering one's body would be in line with being made in God's image in this reasoning. In answering the question, why are we the way we are? Sabia-Tanis concludes, "because God wanted to create human beings who are different from one another" (2018:173).

The right to self-determination is the third aspect of Sabia-Tanis' body theology. "We are our bodies, and I believe that we have a right to make choices about how we care for ourselves, shape ourselves, craft our bodies and our lives, dress ourselves, and move through the world" (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:172). Joining the dots, this right to self-determination is rooted in the theology of God and being made in his image. Going further, if this right is withheld, then transgender people are denied the ability to reflect the revelation of God into the world that they uniquely bring. This again makes the doctrine of God all-important in this discussion.

In stating transgender theology, we have necessarily restricted ourselves to critical issues. We have not looked at disputed texts or biblical examples given, like Joseph, of people not conforming to a binary view of gender. These we will come to when we evaluate transgender theology.

2.5 IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSGENDER THEOLOGY

In exploring transgender theology, we can see that this issue is of primary importance and has many ramifications. Not least is the issue of pastoral care for transgender people. Baldock looks at the damage done to LGBTQ+ Christians through evangelicals trying to "fix them" (2014: 283). Clearly, transgender people of faith can feel marginalised, which adds to their sense of non-acceptance. Is the mainstream evangelical church handling this issue and, therefore, trans people rightly? Sabia-Tanis quotes two examples, one that he sees as disturbing and the other more positive, both from within evangelicalism. The positive example cites the well-known TV evangelist Pat Robertson, who received a call from a viewer who wanted to follow Christ and wanted to know if they should revert to their birth sex/gender. Robertson advised that

the person could go back to their birth gender if they desired to but that it was ok to stay as they were. “God is interested in His heart”, Robertson states. The ‘disturbing’ example involved Jim Cymbalas’s church, where transgenderism was seen as a sick sub-culture as problematic as assaults, knifings, and alcoholism. The church made it clear that conversion meant reverting to his birth sex/gender and was described as “every inch a real man” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:92). A third approach describes a minister’s struggle when a transgender person asks for baptism. The minister concluded:

Of course, we should baptise Mandy, just as she was. Baptism is an initiation, a start of the journey. We bring all our mess into the waters of baptism. It would be totally unreasonable to expect Mandy to go back to a male lifestyle; after all, the operation was irreversible. We must accept her as she is in Christ. We felt that there had already been sufficient evidence of repentance and faith on Mandy’s part, together with a peaceful confirmation in our hearts. We felt we could not refuse baptism (Sabia-Tanis, 2018: 94).

Sabia-Tanis is heartened that the minister in this conservative church uses the correct transgender pronouns and does not encourage the person to revert to their birth sex/gender. In time the person did re-align with their birth gender and marry someone of the opposite sex. Sabia-Tanis does, however, note and find it troubling that the minister did seem to believe that the right thing to do was for the person to revert to their birth sex/gender.

These accounts show the confusion and complexity of dealing with these issues on the ground. Each author that we have surveyed has cited stories of significant harm and hurt done by the evangelical church to transgender people. This cannot be ignored. With strong feelings and convictions on all sides, there is plenty of scope for more heat than light. However, some questions need to be asked in terms of the implications of transgender theology.

Does someone identifying, dressing and living in a gender different to their birth sex exclude them from salvation? And as there are many gender identities, are some more serious as salvation issues than others? For example, is someone who identifies as asexual or non-sexual in the same category as those identifying and living as the opposite sex? In evangelical theology, a person practising homosexuality according to

their biological sex is indeed a salvation issue.⁶ Is this correct? It has eternal implications for transgender people. And it has important implications for membership and full inclusion if it is not a salvation issue.

How do we form a concept of self as Christians? How do we view ourselves, and how does that affect how we live? How are Christians to formulate their gender identity? Is it strictly coupled to biological sex or more complex? The Proud Trust incorporates three layers of personhood that make up gender identity. The first layer is sex characteristics like genitals, chromosomes, hormones and secondary characteristics.⁷ Obviously, these are not determinative in themselves and must give way to the second and third layers of gender expression on a scale that goes from feminine through androgynous to masculine. And finally, sexual orientation ranges from being attracted to women, bi/pan, attracted to men, to asexual. Fundamentally this involves a subjective formulation of gender. Is this correct biblically? If it is not exegetically defensible, then our view of the nature of Scripture and our submission/obedience to it is at stake. Are we whom we feel we are or whom God says we are, is the issue? This also potentially affects discipleship and what it means to follow Christ. The implications also reach out to children in the church. If a church affirms transgender theology and practice, then this is shaping the experience and life of the next generation. Arguably, schools in the UK have witnessed the phenomena of trans-trending. This is where children identify as transgender because others are, and it makes them different and treated as special. With hormone suppressants and reassignment surgery readily available, this is a worrying phenomenon⁸. Would the church be contributing to it? The questions are many and varied.

Of course, a core issue of transgender theology is what we make of God, His character and nature. Have we been misunderstanding and misrepresenting the Trinity? Have we in the past, or are people now seeking to make God in our image? This is a worship

⁶ Stevens, J. (n.d.). *Homosexuality: To Affirm is to Apostatise - The Bible Demands That We Treat Human Sexuality As a First Order Salvation Issue*. [online] Available at: <http://www.john-stevens.com/2022/12/homosexuality-bible-demands-that-we.html> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023].

⁷ The Proud Trust. (n.d.). *Gender Identity (T+)*. [online] Available at: http://theproudstrust.org/young-people/exploring-identity/gender-identity-t/?gclid=CjwKCAjw2f-VBhAsEiwAO4lNeL9-Incl1yzJ6D34BA9TtnWmofpTAfLMmMF0JS5fH7449BoCmAv_5oRoC86cQAvD_BwE [Accessed 9 May. 2022].

⁸ Hannah Barnes concerns come from, *Time to Think: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Tavistock's Gender service for children* (London: Swift Press, 2023). The equivalent service in Scotland closed to new clients in February 2023

and idolatry issue. It is important to note that this is wider than the experience and acceptance of persons.

We have by no means exhausted the implications of transgender theology; we have, however, highlighted primary issues for consideration.

CHAPTER 3:

THE SCOPE OF TRANSGENDER AFFIRMATION IN THE CHURCH

Our first enquiry relates to the scope and extent of transgender theological acceptance within the Church. How peripheral or central is this issue? We will consider influential leaders, denominations, local churches, and parachurch organisations.

3.1 INFLUENTIAL LEADERS

Steve Chalke is a high-profile leader and an advocate for LGBTQ+ people within the church. Chalke has spoken affirmingly that churches could and should be prosecuted if they preach against LGBTQ+ sexuality and gender identity.⁹ Chalke began Transgender affirmation services on 30th October 2016, at the church where he is the minister and has created a liturgy to be used in such services.¹⁰ Articles¹¹ on mainstream prominent Christian websites have given attention to his Transgender affirming stance and publicised articles and pamphlets he has written on the subject. Chalke has been a trailblazer for transgender acceptance within the church, and his influence cannot be overstated. Oasis, Chalke's para-church organisation, aims to change the church into full acceptance of transgenderism.

Like Steve Chalke, Rob Bell was an influential evangelical at a popular level before publicly affirming his approval of same-sex marriage in March 2017 at Grace Cathedral.¹² Same-sex marriage is now intertwined with transgenderism as one or both persons getting married can identify as a different gender. Bell seems to take a pragmatic view in a 2017 interview where he states that "it's like fighting gravity, some people are gay, and some people are straight ... you are moving against the flow of history. It's the last stand of seeing things a particular way before we all move on

⁹ theweeflea (2020). *Steve Chalke and the Threat to Prosecute Evangelical Churches – CT*. [online] TheWeeFlea.com. Available at: <http://theweeflea.com/2020/10/20/steve-chalke-and-the-threat-to-prosecute-evangelical-churches-ct/> [Accessed 12 May. 2022].

¹⁰ premierchristian.news. (n.d.). *Steve Chalke to host church 'renaming ceremony' for transgender man - Premier Christian News | Headlines, Breaking News, Comment & Analysis*. [online] Available at: <http://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/steve-chalke-to-host-church-renaming-ceremony-for-transgender-man> [Accessed 13 Jul. 2022].

¹¹ C.T. staff (n.d.). *Steve Chalke: Churches must 'radically include' transgender people*. [online] www.christiantoday.com. Available at: <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/steve-chalke-churches-must-radically-include-transgender-people/127891.htm> [Accessed 13 Jul. 2022].

¹² HuffPost. (2013). *Rob Bell Comes Out for Marriage Equality*. [online] Available at: http://huffpost.com/entry/rob-bell-comes-gay-marriage_b_2898394 [Accessed 16 Jul. 2023].

together”¹³. Although he goes on to say that he affirms anyone trying to be true to themselves, which is more ideological than pragmatic. Bell first made a global name for himself by making short videos that explained biblical truth. These videos were shown in churches and seen by Christians worldwide. This meant that when Bell went public with LGBT ideological and theological affirmation, he had a broad audience and extensive influence.

Vicky Beeching was a well-known songwriter, singer and worship leader who wrote and sang popular and well-known songs such as Yesterday, today and forever, and, The wonder of the cross. Beeching came out as gay in an interview in the *Independent Newspaper* in 2014¹⁴ and then when she gave the keynote address in 2015 at the gay Christian network. These events sent shock waves across the evangelical world and once again reached many Christians at the popular level. Beeching now advocates for LGBTQ+ people and has spoken out about what she sees as transphobia and hatred.

Matthew Vines gave a speech at his church about accepting LGBTQ+ Christians, which has amassed over one million views on YouTube. Vines then started the Reformation Project to help reform the church’s teaching sexual orientation and gender identity. While Vines is not a church leader, he has taken a leadership role on these issues and has a vast influence.¹⁵

Bishop Christopher Senyonjo is an Anglican priest and an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in Uganda and runs an LGBTQ+ support ministry. Stonewall, an LGBTQ+ pressure group mainly responsible for the progress of LGBTQ+ issues in the UK, has highlighted and honoured Senyonjo as an influential faith leader for the LGBTQ+ cause. Senyonjo writes, “As Christians, we must learn to accept people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) as children of God. There have always been LGBT people in the church, and there always will be.” It is notable that African Anglicanism influences worldwide Anglicanism due to its large membership in contrast to other countries. Bishop Senonia

¹³ www.youtube.com. (n.d.). *ROB BELL ON TRANSGENDERISM*. [online] Available at: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=ATUHgsgVCDM> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023]. [Accessed 16 Jul. 2022].

¹⁴ The Independent. (2014). *Vicky Beeching: ‘I’m gay. God loves me just the way I am’*. [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/vicky-beeching-star-of-the-christian-rock-scene-i-m-gay-god-loves-me-just-the-way-i-am-9667566.html> [Accessed 17 Jul. 2022].

¹⁵ Buckley, M. (2017). *Notable Christians who’ve had a change of heart on LGBT issues*. [online] Religion News Service. Available at: <https://religionnews.com/2017/07/12/notable-christians-whove-had-a-change-of-heart-on-lgbt-issues/> [Accessed 17 Jul. 2022].

is by no means a lone voice in Anglicanism. Tinker quotes the Archbishop of Canterbury, “Same-sex marriage builds on the presumption that marriage is stable and lifelong (the rootedness of the tradition), while also responding to the massive shift in cultural acceptance with regard to the understanding of human nature and sexual orientation” (Tinkler, 2018: 76). While Welby is commenting on Same-Sex marriage, we shall see that LGBTQ+ issues all hold together. A professing evangelical Anglican, Jayne Ozanne opposed conversion therapy within the synod.¹⁶ Ozanne argued, “The biblical concern is not with who we are but with how we live our lives, meaning that sexual orientation and gender identities are not inherently sinful, nor mental health disorders to be ‘cured’” (Tinker, 2018: 78-79).

These are a sample of influential Christian leaders and influencers who demonstrate that the acceptance of LGBTQ+ ideology and theology within the church is found at the grassroots level. This is not a discussion merely at an academic level reserved for universities and training institutions.

3.2 DENOMINATIONAL AND CHURCH SUPPORT FOR TRANSGENDERISM

It is estimated that the Methodist church has over 70 million members worldwide. In June 2021, the Methodist church voted to allow same-sex marriage in their congregations. A vote to change the definition of marriage at the Methodist conference was overwhelmingly passed at two hundred and fifty-four for and forty-six against.¹⁷ There was a freedom of conscience clause that meant that ministers would not be forced to officiate at same-sex weddings. This makes LGBTQ+ issues in the approximately four thousand British Methodist churches open and progressive change to an affirming stance more likely within those congregations. Anecdotally, Pastors of evangelical churches have commented on professing evangelical Christians leaving their evangelical churches to join the Methodist church because of their LGBTQ+

¹⁶ Ozanne is currently one of the most prominent advocates of banning ‘conversion therapy’ and an influential voice in support of the bill that passed in the Scottish parliament but was blocked from passing into law by the Westminster government on February 7th 2023 using a Section 35 order. GOV.UK. (n.d.). *HTML version*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statement-of-reasons-related-to-the-use-of-section-35-of-the-scotland-act-1998/html-version> [Accessed 17 Jul. 2022].

¹⁷ Methodist Church allows same-sex marriage in ‘momentous’ vote. (2021). *BBC News*. [online] 30 Jun. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-57658161> [Accessed 17 Jul. 2022].

affirmation. It is noteworthy that the first transgender minister in the Methodist church was ordained in 2017.¹⁸

As of 2016, 40% of Anglican Christians claimed to be evangelical, making 60% more liberal-leaning.¹⁹ This weighting towards a liberal expression of Christianity was seen in pastoral guidance given in 2019 to its church leaders. Part of the guidance states, “The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that body into which all Christians have been baptised into one Spirit.” The document goes on to recommend the public use and affirmation of a person’s new name after they have transitioned to a different gender in a celebratory way. Whilst the evangelical wing of Anglicanism has so far stood firmly against blessing for those who transition and are against same-sex marriage, this statement makes strong theological affirmations. It includes those living a transgender lifestyle in the body of Christ. In other words, it accepts and affirms that you can actively be transgender and a Christian. This is not accepted in conservative Evangelicalism. This sends a strong message to the 85 million Anglicans worldwide and arguably prepares the way for further change and reform to be more inclusive of transgender people. It would be jumping the gun to look at the implications of this for Anglicanism but they are far-reaching. The Ozanne Foundation carried out a survey which claims that 55% of Anglicans in England believe that gay marriage is right.²⁰ This increases to 72% in those under 50 years of age. However, it is unclear as to whether Ozanne includes non-church attending Anglicans in her study. Nevertheless, the statistics are striking. Given that 40% of the church claims to be evangelical, it demonstrates that this is not just a liberal phenomenon within the church. Additionally, in 2018 the Church of England issued new advice saying the

¹⁸ Premierchristian.news. (2017). *Methodist Church set to ordain first transgender minister - Premier Christian News | Headlines, Breaking News, Comment & Analysis*. [online] Available at: <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/methodist-church-set-to-ordain-first-transgender-minister> [Accessed 17 Jul. 2022].

The Economist. (n.d.). *Hot and bothered*. [online] Available at:

<https://www.economist.com/britain/2012/03/10/hot-and-bothered> [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022].

²⁰ SAME SEX MARRIAGE RESEARCH 2022 - Ozanne Foundation. (n.d.). *Ozanne Foundation*. [online] Available at: <https://ozanne.foundation/project/same-sex-marriage-research-2022/>. [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022].

baptism service could be adapted to allow transgender people to celebrate their new sexual identity.²¹

In terms of the general disposition of the Synod toward LGBTQ+ issues, including transgenderism, Tinker quotes Dr Chil Kaw Tan, “12 years ago when I first joined synod, the LGBT lobby consisted of a little stand with a few people handing out leaflets... 12 years on, they are the all-winning victorious juggernaut, crushing all in its path. Not only is the LGBT constituency well and truly embedded in the organisational structure of the Church of England, its agenda for change dominates proceedings”(Tinker, 2018: 12).

There are many Anglican Churches that have already fully embraced transgenderism. It will be beneficial to consider some examples to see the extent of inclusion.

St Mary’s in London includes this welcoming statement on their website:

We are blessed at St Mary’s to have many LGBTQ+ members, both individuals and couples, who serve and lead in our Sunday services, small groups, worship band, kids and youth teams. We understand the importance of representation, so we also invite LGBTQ+ guest speakers from time to time and we have a member of our LGBTQ+ community, Peter, on our PCC (Church Council).²²

It is of note that this does not just say that all people are welcome at Church, which should be true of all churches, but aims at full inclusion, including leadership.

All Saints Church in Loughborough, U.K. holds “special LGBT affirming services”²³ and is part of the Inclusive Church network, which we will look at shortly. The inclusive aspect of the church includes gender identity. All Saints Parish Church Leamington Spa is home to “LGBTXians” and states, “The good news is, there are several churches in Leamington who are now openly welcoming and affirming, and we are delighted to be one of them. We do not exclude anyone from attending church or from contributing to or

²¹ News, B. (2018). *Trans people invited to mark sex change in Church of England*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46516299> [Accessed 21 Jul. 2023].

²² www.stmaryslondon.com. (n.d.). *St Mary’s London - LGBTQ*. [online] Available at: <https://www.stmaryslondon.com/lgbtq> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023].

²³ allsaintsloughborough.org.uk. (n.d.). *Inclusive Church - All Saints Church Loughborough*. [online] Available at: <https://allsaintsloughborough.org.uk/about/inclusive-church> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023].

leading our worship.”²⁴ They have an LGBTQ+ contact form on their website. It is again noteworthy that in distinction to conservative evangelical churches, LGBTQ+ people are not just welcome to attend but also to lead worship and fully participate as Christians.

Other areas of the professing church in the UK that embrace LGBTQ+ theology and practice to a degree that is at odds with conservative evangelicalism are the Church in Wales, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Church of Scotland, the International Council of Community Churches, the affirming Pentecostal Church International, and the United Reformed Church.²⁵ One minister in the Church of Wales was given an award for her support of LGBTQ+ community.²⁶

The Roman Catholic Church has been a champion of traditional family values, however, it is not untouched by LGBTQ+ and transgender issues. Tinker notes that the current Pope Francis in 2015 appointed Father Timothy Radcliffe as a consultant for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Earlier Radcliffe wrote, “How does all this bear on the question of gay sexuality? We cannot begin with the question of whether it is permitted or forbidden! We must ask what it means and how far it is Eucharistic. Certainly, it can be generous, vulnerable, tender and non-violent. So in many ways, I think that it can be expressive of Christ’s self-gift. We can also see how it can be expressive of mutual fidelity, a covenantal relationship in which two people bind themselves to each other forever” (Tinker 2018:77-88).

3.3 PARA-CHURCH ORGANISATIONS PROMOTING TRANSGENDER INCLUSIVISM

There are several influential organisations in the UK that aim at promoting transgender inclusivism within the Church and support LGBTQ+ professing Christians. This twofold object is an effective focus. We will consider the main organisations.

²⁴ All Saints’ Parish Church, Leamington Spa. (2014). *LGBT+ Christians*. [online] Available at: <http://www.allsaintschurchleamington.org.uk/lgbt-christians.html> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023]. [Accessed 21 Jul. 2022].

²⁵ GayChurch.org. (n.d.). *Affirming Denominations*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gaychurch.org/affirming-denominations/>. [Accessed 21 Jul. 2022].

²⁶ Church in Wales. (n.d.). *Cardiff priest honoured with LGBT award*. [online] Available at: <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/news-and-events/cardiff-priest-honoured-lgbt-award/> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023]. [Accessed 22 Jul. 2022].

Inclusive Church is an organisation that contains hundreds of Churches in the UK that affirm, among other things, transgenderism. It is registered as an educational charity with the clear aim of educating the church about inclusivism. Inclusive Church originated within Anglicanism, but they now “work with churches of different denominations encouraging them to explore ways in which they may become more inclusive”²⁷

One Body One Faith is a “dynamic grassroots charity that enables LGBTQ+ Christians and advocates for change within the Church, ecumenically and internationally in partnership with like-minded organisations”²⁸ They are motivated by what they see as the suffering of LGBTQ+ Christians in most church environments and desire for “LGBTQ+ Christians to thrive, not just survive.” To this end they campaign on issues like conversion therapy and put on and publicise events that promote inclusion. This is not limited to the church setting but also includes schools. They also offer grants of up to £500 for Christians to engage with Pride initiatives.

Affirm is a “UK network of Baptist Christians working together for LGBTQ+ inclusion”²⁹ Affirm aims to resource local churches with events and training and build relationships with Baptists to influence them towards LGBTQ+ affirmation.

Diverse Church has three main aims. 1. Provide pastoral care to support LGBTQ+ Christians. 2. Mobilise communities that can act as local support and encouragement for LGBTQ+ Christians. 3. Promote theological discussion in the broader church by enabling LGBTQ+ Christians to share their stories and to do so through academic debate.³⁰

Open Table “welcomes people of every gender identity and sexual orientation. We meet online and in-person, hosted by inclusive churches”³¹ Open Table seems to seek to bring LGBTQ+ Christians and those wanting to explore faith together rather than act as

²⁷ Anon, (n.d.). *About Us – Inclusive Church*. [online] Available at: <https://www.inclusive-church.org/about-us/> [Accessed 22 Jul. 2022].

²⁸ www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk. (n.d.). *OneBodyOneFaith | Home*. [online] Available at: <https://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk/>. [Accessed 3 Aug. 2022].

²⁹ Affirm. (n.d.). *About*. [online] Available at: <https://www.affirm.org.uk/about> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2022].

³⁰ Diverse Church. (n.d.). *About Diverse Church*. [online] Available at: <https://diversechurch.website/about>. [Accessed 4 Aug. 2022].

³¹ Open Table Network. (n.d.). *Open Table Network*. [online] Available at: <https://opentable.lgbt/> [Accessed 4 Aug. 2022].

a lobby group within the wider church. Nevertheless, those in the wider church who are confused about their gender identity or about the subject, in general, are able to go along to meetings and find support. This may well be an avenue such Christians may take rather than talking to the pastoral leadership in their own churches.

A geographically broader organisation that encompasses the UK is the European Forum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and transgender Christians.³² They provide sharing of information, international cooperation, and friendship across political, cultural, and language boundaries. This is with the aim of achieving “equality and inclusion for LGBTQ+ people within and through Christian churches”.

There is no doubt that the Christian transgender movement is well organised and well resourced, with clear aims and fervency in achieving those aims. The sense of being on a social justice mission akin to great historical struggles like the abolishment of slavery is palpable. Next, we will conduct a brief survey and overview of transgender theology which we will engage with and evaluate later.

³² www.lgbtchristians.eu. (n.d.). *European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups*. [online] Available at: <https://www.lgbtchristians.eu/>. [Accessed 4 Aug. 2022].

CHAPTER 4:

HOW DID WE ARRIVE HERE?

Our question for exploration in this chapter is, how did we arrive at the point where transgender theology is becoming an issue for the church? What are the cultural and philosophical shifts in society that have enabled it? What influence have the media and pressure groups had on Christians? Have the methods of spiritual formation in the Church enabled the formulation and acceptance of the transgender experience? Does a person's view of the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture inform such theology? And have we drifted to this place as a natural societal progression, or has it been purposeful? We will consider these constituent parts in order to observe a larger enabling narrative.

4.1 CULTURAL REVOLUTION

In his book, *That Hideous Strength: how the west was lost*, Melvin Tinker argues that we are in a neo-Marxist revolution that is almost complete. It will be helpful to define Neo-Marxism before looking at its parts and progress to ascertain the validity of this claim. Quoting Sydney Hooks, Tinker writes that Neo-Marxism is

A philosophy of human liberation. it seeks to overcome human alienation, to emancipate man from repressive social institutions, especially economic institutions that frustrate his true nature, and to bring him into harmony with himself, his fellow men and the world around him so that he can overcome his estrangements and express his true essence through creative freedom" (Tinker, 2018:46-47).

And then, quoting Andrew Sandlin,

Libertarian Marxism is all about liberating humanity from the social institutions and conditions (like the family and church and business and traditional values and habits and authorities) that prevent the individual from realising his true self, his true desires and aspirations, from being anything he wants to be - full autonomy... Libertarian Marxism is the Marxism of our culture, of our time (Tinker, 2018:46).

The label of neo, cultural or libertarian Marxism is, of course, an exercise in pinning the ideological label on the cultural donkey and additionally seeks to attribute purpose and motive to a group of people in engineering society. These people are often referred to as cultural elites, although Tinker locates its primary source in spiritual entities and

warfare (2018: 25-27). Whether this is a correct appropriation depends both on the factual events of history and demonstrating the correlated ideology to those events. We are not there yet in our research, but the lens is a helpful one.

Tinker asks, “How is such a revolution – one in which ‘God is brought down’ and his objective creation to which humanity must conform is discredited – to be achieved?” Tinker references Peter Berger and the strategy of changing societies’ plausibility structures, “that is the background assumptions, beliefs and ways of thinking and acting which are taken as given... the aim is to get people to think and to feel for themselves that certain values and practices, such as same-sex marriage, are common sense, fair or even natural” (Tinker, 2018:47). While Tinker here highlights same-sex marriage, he applies this to the whole sexual revolution, including gender identity (Tinker, 2018:61-71). We will note the beginning of the change in plausibility structures here and then return to it in the following sections. Our focus turns now more narrowly to the cultural evolution of modern transgenderism.

Tinker observes that over the last sixty years, there has been the death of Christian culture in the West, which has made room for a Neo-Marxist culture. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in a sermon on Psalm 2³³, attributed the beginning of the demise of the widespread acceptance of Christianity to the death of a generation of Christian men and fathers in the First and Second World Wars. This, according to Lloyd-Jones, was the culture-shaping catalyst of recent history. And, of course, the rise of higher criticism at the turn of the twentieth century on the back of the Enlightenment. After the Second World War, in the 1950s, the societal ‘party’ began dubbing this period the ‘swinging fifties.’ In May 1950, the contraceptive Pill was made available. This paved the way for the beginning of the modern sexual revolution in the 1960s. The result was “liberalised attitudes toward sex and morality.”³⁴ Erotic films, books and media became popular, bringing sexual behaviour into public discourse. Second Wave feminism was now in full

³³ www.youtube.com. (n.d.). *Why Do the Nations Rage...? – A Sermon on Psalm 2:1*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yS2TMNABqXg> [Accessed 07 Aug. 2022].

³⁴ Callum G. Brown, *Religion and the Demographic Revolution: Women and Secularisation in Canada, Ireland, UK and USA since the 1960s*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012)

swing, and the various women's liberation movements "sought to free women from social and moral confines"³⁵

Second Wave feminism also questioned the traditional gender roles of men and women. Whilst this was a different agenda to transsexualism, it was a contributing precursor to which we will return. Towards the end of the 1960s, there was greater acceptance and celebration of homosexuality, leading to the emboldened Stonewall riots in 1969³⁶ The gay liberation movement was born, which urged, "lesbians and gay men to engage in radical direct action, and to counter societal shame with gay pride ... the most basic form of activism was an emphasis on coming out to family, friends, and colleagues, and living a life as an openly lesbian or gay person"³⁷

In the 1970s, the sexual revolution found further traction with the landmark ruling of *Roe v Wade*, which introduced abortion on demand on 22nd January 1973. Along with the contraceptive pill, this ruling liberalised attitudes to sexual conduct, further removing the fear of pregnancy. Christian sexuality was now seen as prudish in the light of this new-found sexual 'freedom.'

The coming of age of the homosexual revolution happened in the U.K. when same-sex marriage was legalised on 13th March 2014.³⁸ By 2018, same-sex marriage was legal in twenty nations, and by 2022 it was legal in thirty-two nations. There is much overlap between transgenderism and homosexuality; for example, a biological male identifying as a female can marry another biological male. The coming of age of the homosexual revolution ushered in with it the transgender revolution. The cultural gates had been opened.

³⁵ Callum G. Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain: Sex, Humanists and Secularisation, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) is a detailed academic study of this topic. A more popular history of the 1960s sexual revolution in the UK is Virginia Nicholson, *How was it for you: Women, Love Sex and Power in the Sexual Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2019).

³⁶ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall: The Definitive Story of the LGBTQ Rights Uprising that Changed America* (2nd ed; New York; Plume, 2019)

³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gay_liberation Additionally, Historical Dictionary of the Gay Liberation Movement: Gay Men and their search for Social Justice (Religions, Philosophies and Movements) (Hunt, R.j, 1999, Ohio)

³⁸ parliament.uk. (n.d.). *The law of Marriage*. [online] Available at: http://parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private_lives/relationships/overview/lawofmarriage/#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20Parliament%20passed%20the,couple%20in%20England%20and%20Wales. [Accessed 27 Aug. 2022].

We will now consider four contributing streams that aided the cultural revolution; secularism, emotionalism, therapeutic individualism and radical feminism. These are powerhouse ideologies upon which the sexual revolution was carried.

4.2 SECULARISM

Secularism is defined as “the principle of seeking to conduct human affairs based on secular, naturalistic considerations” (Brown 2019:170-19). Materialistic atheism is an expression of secularism and has been prominent in the exclusion of religion in the public sphere and influenced individuals against personal faith. David Wells suggests that secular humanism is a fundamental plausibility structure that has paved the way for non-religious belief and morality located in the individual, “It is axiomatic that secularism strips life of the divine, but it is important to see that it does so by relocating the divine in that part of life which is private” (Wells 1992:79)³⁹. In other words, the role once ascribed to God regarding truth, morality and conduct is now ascribed to individuals in the absence of God. And where secularism is happy for people to acknowledge the existence of God, it is only on the condition that divine truth and morality are private to the degree of not affecting public discourse, institutions or other individuals. “This is, as David Martin contends, a convenient way of showing that these anti-religious ideologies do now ‘triumph over recalcitrant phenomena,’ for in Europe, the Church is shrinking” (Wells, 1992:80-81).

This secularising process of society means that there have been no fixed, public, agreed-upon norms for truth, morality and lifestyle in society. Perhaps a biblical parallel, in practice, not ideological terms, is the tribes of Israel at the time of the Judges, where “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”⁴⁰ Wells agrees that, “There are no core values that are accorded wide assent or commonly invoked in order to regulate the competing interests that jostle one another all the time in a society such as this.” (1992:81) We can note that secularism has also contributed to both a post-modern approach to truth and expressive individualism, which we will consider later.

³⁹ Wells is writing for the American context, however, as Brown points out the UK, Ireland and USA are “intimately and causatively connected.” (Brown 2012: 1). The same trends are present and connected in all three contexts.

⁴⁰ Judges 21:25

The new millennium saw the rise of militant atheism and popular scientism. The catalyst can perhaps be traced to the tragedy of 11th September 2001 when aeroplanes flew into the World Trade Centre. In response Sam Harris wrote, *The End of Faith* (2004). Harris saw religion as an existential threat and the secularising of society as an urgent need. The new atheist movement was born. This movement championed science and rational thought as the answer to mankind's problems. Harris was later joined by Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Christopher Hitchens. They attempted to change the narrative and description of Christianity from morally good to immoral, violent, controlling and dangerous. Remarkably this became a popular movement and was not restricted to the academy or university. The effect on the further secularising of western culture cannot be understated. They were dubbed the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Of course, the apocalypse referred to the demise of religion. Dawkins, perhaps the most prolific of the new atheists, ran an advertising campaign on London buses that said, "There's probably no God; now stop worrying and enjoy your life."⁴¹ The message was clear: do not believe in God, and you can do what you want without any fear of being accountable for your actions.

The new atheists presented a utopian view of a world without religion where human beings could solve their own problems and be 'free' without the suffocating constraints and immoral imperatives of religion. Scientism⁴² and rationalism were the new Moses and Joshua leading into the promised land. This was a modified restatement of the promise of the Enlightenment, of mankind coming of age and putting off childish superstition. Was the optimism of the new atheists historically valid? With the turn of the 20th century and Enlightenment thought and optimism at a crescendo, what did the coming of age of mankind look like? What did throwing off the shackles of religion achieve? Perhaps a great depression, two world wars, and the bloodiest century in world history were not envisaged. But how did the further secularising of society by the new atheists contribute to the transgender aspect of the sexual revolution?

⁴¹ Humanists UK. (n.d.). *Atheist Bus Campaign*. [online] Available at:

<https://humanists.uk/campaigns/successful-campaigns/atheist-bus-campaign/> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2022].

⁴² Scientism places undue weight on the scientific method for solving the world's problems and providing a philosophical framework for life. The term does not denigrate the scientific method or progress, rather it describes the undue teleological and ontological weight placed upon it. Critical studies of Scientism include Mikael Stenmark, *Scientism, Ethics and Religion* (London: Routledge 2001)

The crusades of the new atheists came with unintended consequences. It seems society, while happy with the further dismantling of religion, was not so enamoured with science as religion's replacement. Throwing off the perceived shackles of God meant greater personal expression and freedom, not greater reliance on scientific thought and rationalism. Arguably, the diverse freedoms also increased state control as the state seeks to protect and govern diverse, competing freedoms and enforce those that they agree with. This is a hint or reflection of atheistic communist states where the state assumes the role of God as the authority in governing people's lives. The new atheists did not account for western individualism, emotionalism and the role of social imagination in forming modern society. These are themes we will shortly explore. Dawkins seems disillusioned with the promised land that he had helped to create. In the area of transgenderism, Dawkins seems to hold to a scientific biological view of gender but also seems wary of cancel culture⁴³ and so perhaps less vocal. In 2015 Dawkins tweeted, "Some men choose to identify as women, and some women choose to identify as men. You will be vilified if you deny that they literally are what they identify as. Discuss."⁴⁴ In response, the American Humanist Society withdrew from Dawkins its 1996 award of humanist of the year. The *Washington Examiner* has called Dawkins the "latest apostate from the church of progressive humanism"⁴⁵. Dawkins was a champion of scientific, rationalistic humanism, not progressivism. Society, at least the influential part of it, does not want scientific rationalism but the freedom to reinvent itself as it pleases. This is the enabling effect of secularism and materialistic atheism on the transgender revolution.

Secularism's Contribution to the Rise of Transgender Theology

⁴³ Cancel culture is the phenomenon of speakers and artists being cancelled and banned from speaking at Universities and venues because of their views on issues of LGBTQ+ or issues that are encapsulated within intersectionality.

⁴⁴ Twitter (n.d.). <https://twitter.com/richarddawkins/status/1380812852055973888?lang=en-GB>. [online] Available at: <https://twitter.com/richarddawkins/status/1380812852055973888?lang=en-GB> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2022].

⁴⁵ Greenesmith, H. (2021). *Atheist Richard Dawkins Swings to Anti-Trans Right in Grasp at Broader Intellectual Relevance*. [online] Religion Dispatches. Available at: <https://religiondispatches.org/atheist-richard-dawkins-swings-to-anti-trans-right-in-grasp-at-broader-intellectual-relevance/>. [Accessed 29 Aug. 2022].

The march of secularism began with the enlightenment as early as the 1600s. Henrique Laitenberger, in his doctoral thesis, *Protestant Enlightenment(s)?*⁴⁶ noted that “theologians and theologies were marked by an enlightenment frame of mind.” (Laitenberger, 2019:27). And referencing Karl Barth, “Barth ultimately concluded that, however sincere the faith of its proponents, 18th century enlightened theology ultimately represented an attempt to subject divinity to humanity, that is to secularise and corrode the foundations of Christianity” (Laitenberger, 2019: 28). Laitenberger argues that the secularisation thesis also held sway in the faculties, “perpetuating the narratives of 19th-century protestant theologians who emphasised the essential antithesis of Reformation Christianity” (Laitenberger, 2019:27). This is an important implication of early enlightenment thinking having a secularising impact upon Christian living and thought. One of the heart cries of the reformation was Sola Scriptura, that Scripture alone is the church’s authority and that her doctrine would be formed from Scripture using the analogy of Scripture; Scripture interpreting Scripture.

Two implications are immediate. The power of liberal theology in the early twentieth century came about through a secularising ideological movement from the enlightenment. This meant that Scripture alone as the church’s authority was undermined. Higher criticism⁴⁷ originating in Germany in the late eighteenth century, spread across the western world by the twentieth century, which again enabled liberal theology to take root. A non-evangelical and non-reformational approach to Scripture is systemic to Christian liberalism. Arguably, the Anglican and Episcopalian triad approach to Scripture was influenced by this movement so as to not embrace Scripture alone, but rather Scripture, tradition and reason – as their epistemological and hermeneutical stance. It is of note that transgender theology has mostly come from these two streams, Anglicanism and Episcopalianism. In, *Otherwise Christian*, Chris Paige, a transgender theologian, recommends books to her readers that provide “safe spirituality” (Paige 2019:173). Books include, *Reading the Bible Again: Taking the Bible seriously but not literally*, by Marcus Borg. And, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* by John Shelby Spong, a well-known liberal theologian whose target is

⁴⁶ Laitenberger, H. (2021). *Protestant enlightenment(s)? : the origins and dissemination of enlightenment theology in Anglicanism, German Lutheranism, and Swedish Lutheranism*. [online] ethos.bl.uk. Available at: <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.836752> [Accessed 30 Aug. 2022].

⁴⁷ Higher criticism sought to treat the biblical documents in the same manner as any other historical documents and assumed the documents were neither inspired nor inerrant. It prescribed a sceptical starting point in biblical studies.

wider than fundamentalism but actually all evangelical views of Scripture. Shelby called for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people into the membership of churches. Of note is that Shelby rejects any notion of original sin in his points for reform of Christianity which greatly affects the classification of moral behaviour.⁴⁸ Soughers comments on Spong's view of Paul and homosexuality "Spong further argued that since Paul's understanding about the genesis of homosexuality was not accurate on the basis of current scientific understandings, we need to look elsewhere for an explanation of how Paul came to the conclusion that idolatry was at the root of homosexual activity" (Soughers 2018:36). Part of Spong's answer to this question was that Paul was a repressed homosexual (Soughers 2018: 36). The link between a liberal approach to Scripture and transgender and LGBTQ+ theology is clear.

Wells attributes the loss of theology in the Church fundamentally to secularism and modernism (1992:107-108). Loss of theology does not mean that it does not exist but a loss of its importance and centrality in the life of the Church and its members. Wells is not talking about the liberal church but the evangelical church. Such a slide away from theology leaves a vacuum on the ground for other competing thoughts and ideas, such as transgenderism. Consequently, otherwise evangelical Christians become less anchored in evangelical thought and practice and more open to liberal ideas and theology.

4.3 EMOTIONALISM

Morgan traces the path to emotionalism in three ways, "The path to emotionalism has been a process of elimination, striking down various authorities along the history of ideas. The history of ideas can be roughly summed up in three main epochs: pre-modernism, modernism and postmodernism."⁴⁹ In terms of assent to authority, Hillary Morgan locates authority with God/gods in pre-modernism, in science and rationalism in modernism, and in the individual and their feelings in postmodernism. Modernism to post-modernism was a transition from objectivism to subjectivism. However, subjectivism does not mean the absence of truth in the twenty-first century; instead,

⁴⁸ Anon, (n.d.). *John Shelby Spong's Twelve Theses – Church and Theology*. [online] Available at: <https://churchandtheology.org/john-shelby-spongs-twelve-theses/> [Accessed 5 Sep. 2022].

⁴⁹ Institute, C.R. (2019). *If I Feel it, it's True: Responding to the Rise of Emotionalism*. [online] Christian Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.equip.org/articles/if-i-feel-it-its-true-combating-the-rise-of-emotionalism/> [Accessed 8 Sep. 2022].

Morgan states that the strength of a person's emotions determines the truth of a claim or at least the personal truth of a claim. More emotions, and louder emotions, will convince yourself and others, seems to be the premise. As already noted, the secularising of a society destroyed the foundations of objective truth and morality. God was no longer the arbiter of true and false, moral and immoral. The arbiter was not replaced by science or the state as such but by personal preference and feelings.

The resultant emotionalism, as the test of conviction and personal truth, has progressed in part by what has been dubbed linguistic theft. This is the hijacking or repurposing of language to facilitate other people's emotional truth. Morgan gives a pertinent example of such linguistic theft, "love no longer means to will the good of another, but to affirm the ideas of another. If you do not affirm the ideas of another person's truth, you are unloving."⁵⁰ Morgan goes on to quote Noah Rothman, "It is increasingly common to hear social justice activists equate discomfiting or objectionable speech with acts of violence, and not just in a metaphorical sense...Since they conflate offensive speech and violence, a violent response to speech isn't just reasonable; it's necessary. It's practically self-defence"⁵¹. And so, violence is redefined as speech that makes someone uncomfortable and justifies a literally violent response. Morgan argues that if a person experiences anger because of what another person says, then the anger felt defines the speech as violent. In this new world, free speech is free violence and therefore justifies physical violence, a powerful deterrent to dissent. Such violence has been seen on campuses and in the streets (Murray 2019: 36). Protests in the streets have been accompanied by guillotines. The allusion to the French revolution is evident.

Morgan asks how does one get society to accept this emotional truth? "The answer is simple: by getting others to feel as strongly as you do. This is often achieved through story. Good storytelling is powerful. Through story, one person can convey their experiences to another and elicit a similar emotional response" (Murray, 2019: 36). This observation is in line with the movement from modernism, which appeals to facts, and to post-modernism, which appeals to individual experience. Morgan goes on to state that

⁵⁰ Institute, C.R. (2019). *If I Feel It, It's True: Responding to the Rise of Emotionalism*. [online] Christian Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.equip.org/articles/if-i-feel-it-its-true-combating-the-rise-of-emotionalism/> [Accessed 8 Sep. 2022].

⁵¹ Institute, C.R. (2019). *If I Feel It, It's True: Responding to the Rise of Emotionalism*. [online] Christian Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.equip.org/articles/if-i-feel-it-its-true-combating-the-rise-of-emotionalism/> [Accessed 8 Sep. 2022].

this is not just an issue in society but also the church. Testimonies, Morgan argues, have become less about gospel facts and more about how a person's feelings have changed since coming to Christ. This observation will be important when we focus on how transgender theology is finding traction within the Church. Could it be that the world's mantra of, if it feels good, do it, has crept into the church as, if it feels good, it's true? What are the implications for biblical authority?

Returning to the larger societal picture, Carl Trueman asks,

Why does the sentence, I am a woman trapped in a man's body, make sense not simply to those who have sat in poststructuralist and queer-theory seminars but to my neighbours, to people I pass on the street? The statement is after all, emblematic of a view of personhood that has almost completely dispensed with the idea of any authority beyond that of personal, psychological conviction, an oddly Cartesian notion: I think I am a woman; therefore, I am a woman. How did such a strange idea become the common orthodox currency of our culture? (Trueman, 2020:37).

In beginning to answer this question, Trueman references Charles Taylor's theory of the social imaginary, a constituent part of emotionalism. This involves how ordinary people imagine their environment through images, stories and legends. Imagination has more to do with our emotional life than with philosophical theories and facts. This, Taylor argues, means that larger swaths of society are impacted by such imaginings, of which storytelling is a significant part. Trueman states,

The fact that I am a woman trapped in a man's body makes sense to Joe Smith probably has far less to do with being committed to an elaborate understanding of the nature of gender and its relationship to biological sex than to the fact that it seems intuitively correct to affirm someone in his or her chosen identity and hurtful not to do so (Trueman, 2020:38).

In practice, then, the post-modern, post-objectivist era makes personal truth claims through intense emotion reinforced through story, and the circle is completed and validated through people determining the correct response - by how it would make the person making the claim feel. To not hurt a person's feelings seems intuitively right. Emotion is viewed as the arbiter between truth and falsehood.

Another related facet that has enabled the transgender revolution is what Taylor refers to as Mimesis and Poieses. Trueman describes these ways of looking at the world. Mimesis is seeing the world as having an objective, intrinsic meaning, and the human being's task is to discover it. Poiesis, in contrast, "sees the world as so much raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual" (Trueman, 2020:39). The secularising of society has meant a move from Mimesis to Poiesis. Without God, there is no objective meaning or purpose to life, and this leaves individuals and societies to create that meaning for themselves. It brings an imperative for each individual to create themselves and their lives both teleologically and subjectively. Trueman rightly states that the advancement of knowledge and technology makes this possible in ways that would have been impossible in previous times,

Reality can be imagined and manipulated to our own will and desires in unprecedented ways. I am a woman trapped in a man's body - such a statement is plausible only in a world in which the predominant way of thinking is poietic rather than mimetic. And a poietic world is one in which transcendent purpose collapses into the immanent and in which given purpose collapses into any purpose I choose to create or decide for myself. Human nature, one might say, becomes something individuals or societies invent for themselves" (Trueman, 2020:42).

Seeking such meaning and purpose through feelings and emotion when technology allows for medical interventions like hormone replacement therapy and reassignment surgery in adolescence is a great cause for concern, as already noted.

Of course, the emphasis on the sovereignty of personal emotion comes at a high price, not just in medically irreversible procedures but also in the form of diminished mental health. This has caused some institutions to create 'safe spaces and give 'trigger warnings' about content that some may find emotionally upsetting. "There are safe spaces on campuses for the emotionally fragile youth to retreat to (with their phones) if they encounter opinions that make them uncomfortable."⁵² However, this is not just the effect on those spearheading the transgender revolution but on society as a whole. Mental health days, where employees are expected to take days off to deal with anxiety

⁵² TechDetox Box. (n.d.). *Emotionally Fragile Online Self - Why Young People Fall Apart*. [online] Available at: <https://www.techdetoxbox.com/screen-time-problems/emotionally-fragile-online-self/> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023]. [Accessed 8 Sep. 2022].

and other psychological ills, are now expected and normal. This cannot be trivialised. The WHO reports that 1 in 100 deaths in the world are through suicide, and 58% of those deaths are in those under 50 years of age. Depression went up by 25% in the first year of the Covid Pandemic. Whilst increased strain on mental health due to the pandemic is understandable, the data would seem to suggest that people are less robust in their mental health than at previous times.⁵³ Emotionalism and social media over-stimulation present a perfect storm for a mental health crisis. The effect of this is self-fulfilling and entrenches and reinforces the validity of a person's feelings – without evaluation for objective justification. Intense emotion validates a person's truth, and mental fragility adds to the need to affirm that truth at a society-wide level. The harm experienced in disagreeing is seen as evidence that a person's response is toxic and they are personally unloving, unkind and hateful.

Emotionalism's Contribution to the Rise of Transgender Theology

As we have seen, a consequence of secularism was the loss of objective truth. Once God is rejected as the arbiter of truth and morality, God has to be replaced. Rationalism, humanism, and scientism had all hoped to take up that role. However, the sexual revolution and the quest for personal freedom meant that individuals took up the role of arbiter for themselves. This is fertile soil for emotionalism. We have noted Morgan's observation that emotionalism has found a place within the testimonies of Christians. John Blankenship, in a Church Leaders article, notes that "Churches today have become so reliant on the emotional pull of preaching, worship and faith that it is beginning to produce negative results... It seems to me that we are more interested in giving people a spiritual buzz than teaching them what true worship looks like."⁵⁴ Blankenship warns that: "Our emotions can very easily lead us down the wrong path unless our mind is fully rooted in the Bible....If we teach people that decisions are made from an emotional place (i.e., feeling convicted or feeling led by God), then we will most likely only see temporary results."

⁵³ McMaster, G. (2020). *Millennials and Gen Z are more anxious than previous generations: here's why*. [online] www.ualberta.ca. Available at: <https://www.ualberta.ca/folio/2020/01/millennials-and-gen-z-are-more-anxious-than-previous-generations-heres-why.html>. [Accessed 8 Sep. 2022].

⁵⁴ Blankenship, J. (2021). *How Emotion-Driven Churches Are Ruining Christians*. [online] ChurchLeaders. Available at: <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/303405-emotion-driven-churches-ruining-christians-josh-blankenship.html> [Accessed 11 Sep. 2022].

Blankenship perhaps does not go far enough in mapping out the consequences of feelings or emotion-driven faith. The wrong path he mentions is limitless when Christians start deciding what is true or how they should live based on how they feel or, indeed, on how others feel. The current emotionalism that drives large parts of society also makes Christians susceptible to emotional arguments. The connection to transgender theology is not vague. Perhaps Christians are particularly open to arguments surrounding love. Love is, of course, the great Christian ethic. However, how love is defined is all-important. If the love described by transgender activists in terms of affirming transgenderism is at odds with the biblical definition of love, then affirmation from Christians can be falsely ascribed. Paul David Tripp cautions, “the Bible never tells you to deny your emotions. What the Bible tells you is that your emotions are a barometer of the moral condition of your heart”⁵⁵. This is in contrast to the culture that equates acting in line with your emotions with authenticity. Emotionalism in the church dumbs down reliance on biblical truth and, along with society, locates truth within the individual’s feelings. Tripp’s caution is valid and necessary and arguable points to a cause of the rise of transgender theology.

4.4 THERAPEUTIC INDIVIDUALISM

It is normal for culture to have the effect of turning people outwards from individualism to the common or societal good, which is formative for the individual. Trueman quotes Reif “Culture is another name for a design of motives directing the self outwards towards those communal purposes in which alone the self can be realised and satisfied” (Trueman, 2020: 44). Trueman comments, “This is an important point: culture directs individuals outwards. It is greater than, prior to and formative of the individual. We learn whom we are by learning how to conform ourselves to the purposes of the larger community to which we belong... Reiff was convinced that his (and now our) age represented something dramatic and innovative in cultural history” (Trueman, 2020:44). According to Reif, participation in the outward good of society has had three previous manifestations. First, the political man, second, the religious man, and third, the economic man. Trueman goes on to describe the political man as seen in Plato and

⁵⁵ www.paultripp.com. (n.d.). *033. Sadness and Celebration*. [online] Available at: https://www.paultripp.com/proverbs/posts/033-sadness-and-celebration?gclid=CjwKCAjw3K2XBhAzEiwAmmgrAtHFJbOFbEUXgWUII04UeWIN1U1IOmzDgIqflvPpAsSubUvnNtLnPRoC1NAQAvD_BwE [Accessed 19 Sep. 2022].

Aristotle. “The political man is deeply immersed in civic life” (Trueman, 2020:44). The movement away from the political man came about in the Middle Ages with the religious man who “found his primary sense of self in his involvement in religious activities: attending mass, celebrating feast days, taking part in religious procession, going on pilgrimages” (Trueman, 2020:44). The concept of the religious man was still society-wide and part of the outward communal good. The third manifestation, the economic man, is “the individual who finds his sense of self in his economic activity: trade, production, the making of money” (Trueman, 2020:45). The economic man was formed through the commencement of the industrial revolution in 1760, and the ensuing technological and digital revolutions. He was again an integrated, functioning and contributing member of the whole.

The fourth and current manifestation of culture is the psychological man who is different to those who have gone before him. Rather than finding identity and self in participation and the sharing of societal activities and values, he has turned inwards in the search for identity, meaning and purpose. “a type characterised not so much by finding identity in outward-directed activities as was true for the previous types but rather in the inward quest for personal psychological happiness” (Trueman, 2020:45).

Rief’s approach may be too simplistic as a theory of culture. At this point, Trueman disagrees with Rief, “for a start, the Apostle Paul’s development of the concept of the will is what facilitates the rise of inner psychological narratives as a means of reflecting on the self. In the fourth century, Paul’s intellectual heir Augustine produced the confessions, the first great Western work of psychological autobiography which indicates the existence of life understood in terms of inner mental space long before Freud”, Trueman cites Martin Luther as another example, “He was an Augustinian friar whose life would have revolved around religious observances and yet whose introspective angst played a key role in the birth of the modern age” (Trueman 2020:45). However, Trueman may be overstating his objection on two counts. It is hard to think that Rief was so naïve or simplistic as to believe these categories or manifestations of culture were entirely water-tight without overlap or exception. They appear more to be generalisations typifying the mood of the culture. Additionally, Trueman perhaps overlooks that God was at work by His Holy Spirit in the Apostle Paul, Augustine, and Luther. These individuals were not representative of their culture, but actually, God

inspired counter-cultural revolutionaries. Trueman does concede that “nevertheless if the historical scheme is greatly oversimplified, the significance of the rise of psychological categories as the dominant factor is how westerners think of themselves and who they consider themselves to be is surely right” (2020: 46). In the end Trueman validates Rief’s characterisation of the current culture quoting Charles Taylor “psychological categories, and an inward focus are the hallmarks of being a modern person” (Trueman, 2020:45). Charles Taylor labelled this period as expressive individualism in a culture of authenticity. This Taylor defined as:

The understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late eighteenth century, that each of us has his/her own way of realising our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority (Trueman, 2020:46).

This is an important insight and definition of the individualism of the current time. Both the aspects of inward self-realisation and the resultant refusal to conform to societal norms or expectations have a profound impact on what society looks like and how it operates as a whole. How does a society cohere where competing expressive individualism is the order of the day? What shape do rights and responsibilities take and how are they balanced in this individualism? Which feelings, stories and ideas become the dominant narrative in society? These questions contain the roots of so-called identity politics, where expressive individuals sharing the same feelings and stories band together into groups to affect and influence culture and society so that their story becomes society’s narrative. Without objective truth and morality with which to appeal, these groups polarise people into categories of heroes (those who support them) and villains (those who do not support them). Sharon James comments:

Once you have abolished truth, you are left in a society where value and worth are assigned to people on the basis of their place in a hierarchy of power. Those at the top of the hierarchy are the privileged oppressors (such as white, educated, ‘cisgender’, and able-bodied males). Those at the bottom are the oppressed victims (such as people of colour, disabled, trans, and uneducated people.)” (James 2019: 64) James then introduces the concept of intersectionality “The trump card is played when you invoke ‘intersectionality’ to show that someone can suffer layers of oppression. If a person is marginalised due to multiple factors: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and so on, then their victim status is assured.” In an important insight, James notes that the test of being abused is whether the person feels to be so, “Those classified as

being 'without privilege' or as being 'victims' can claim at any time to have been offended, distressed or insulted, no matter whether there is any objective ground for their claim. Such feelings are subjective, but they cannot be challenged. Someone might claim offence from hearing a sermon or distress from reading a Bible text or an insult from receiving an invitation to a carol service. They can demand that a visiting lecturer be banned from campus or that a university group be disaffiliated. Trauma might be 'triggered' if they hear any expression of a different view from their own" (James, 2019:64).

In terms of transgenderism, the evangelical church is firmly cast as the villain who is to be changed or silenced. (McAlpine, 2021:15). From this comes the narrative of abuse of transgender people by evangelical Christians. The redefinition of violence and love, as previously stated, now informs the definition of abuse, and the therapeutic model of culture prioritises the individual's feelings over objective facts and the intent of evangelical Christians.

That is not to say that evangelical Christians have always responded to the challenge of transgenderism in the most appropriate ways. It is to challenge the concept of abuse used by transgender activists when characterising evangelical Christians. Disagreement causes psychological pain and is, therefore, abusive in this new world. This is also not to digress from our topic of the contribution of therapeutic individualism but to show its effect on the Church, which is, arguably, a cause of the rise of transgender theology. No one likes to be called unloving and unkind, let alone abusive. Of course, this is not a judgment on the rightness or wrongness of transgender theology. That would be premature. The genetic fallacy warns us that how an idea originated or developed does not bear on its truthfulness or validity. Hermeneutics and exegesis will validate or invalidate transgender theology, but we are not yet at that stage. We will now return to how this psychological, expressive individualism arose; it will be pertinent not just for the shaping of current culture but arguably for Christian culture in the modern church.

In exploring the changing nature of therapy, "Reif sees two historic reversals underlying this new world of the psychological man. The first is the transformation of the understanding of therapy. Traditionally, the role of the therapist in any given culture was to enable the patient to grasp the nature of the community to which he belonged" (Trueman, 2020:47). Reif then contextualises this statement with the example of the religious man being counselled by priests about religious duty and participation. "These

are the things that produce a commitment to the community, which is prior to, and more important than, any particular individual” (Trueman, 2020:47). This is a stark contrast to the individualism of the current culture, which is low trust and low commitment. Trueman makes the point that such therapeutic activity assumes that community activity is for the common good (Trueman, 2020:47). In the current expression of culture, the common good is defined by the individual and their group rather than society as a whole. The roots of this change are found in the eighteenth century with thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that “community was a hindrance to the full expression of the authentic individual” (Trueman, 2020:47). Additionally, “In Freud... the notion of community as a good is also placed under pressure and significantly qualified. A charitable reading of his cultural theory allows that the repressed community we have is at best merely preferable to the bloodthirsty chaos that the alternative offers” (Trueman, 2020:48).

Karl Marx believed that the community at large had to be overthrown and replaced in order for humanity to thrive and reach its potential. “And once we have the fusion of Marx and Freud in figures such as Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, the community as it now exists becomes not simply repressive and of need to revolutionary change specifically in terms of its sexual codes” (Trueman, 2020:48).

Modern thinking, Trueman argues, destroys the idea that the community at large is good for, or serves, the interests of the individual. We have here then the seeds and catalyst of the move from corporatism to individualism and with a specific emphasis on sexual ethics. Therapy ceased to serve the purpose of socialisation and instead focused on protecting the individual from society’s norms and expectations and working on self-fulfilment.

The contribution of the ideas of other individuals on sexual ethics and individualism at this point is appropriate.

Karl Ulrichs (1825-1895)

Ulrich was a campaigner for homosexual rights and “advanced the theory of a female soul in a man’s body in order to argue the case that homosexuality was innate and should not be penalised... This was the beginning of the idea that biological sex could be divided from the gendered experience” (James, 2019:55). This is a crucial

observation by James. The idea that gender is different to biological sex and that your gender identity is the “real you” is prolific and foundational for transgender theory and theology. Gender used to be a synonym for sex.⁵⁶ A question in our next chapter must be, can sex and gender really be separated and different? We have already noted that current transgender theology rejects the notion of being trapped in the wrong body, which not all evangelical authors have caught up with⁵⁷ This idea seems to have been important for the movement in its early and middle stages, but now that transgenderism no longer seeks justification it has been jettisoned. What has been kept is the resultant idea of sex and gender identity being different.

Next, we will see how gender variance was added to the decoupling of sex and gender through Magnus Hirschfield.

Magnus Hirschfield (1894-1956)

Hirschfield, James notes, was an architect of the sexual revolution. “He believed that every man and every woman has a mixture of male and female characteristics, and he devised a classification of ‘gender variant’ individuals in 1910... Hirschfield later oversaw the first ‘sex reassignment’ surgeries... Hirschfield delivered his first lecture on Transsexualism in 1930” (James, 2019:56).

Hirschfield was followed by Benjamin who built on the ideas of gender variance to form theories of gender fluidity. However, gender fluidity was not the total sum of Hirschfield’s contribution.

Harry Benjamin (1885-1986)

“Benjamin wrote the first textbook on transsexualism in 1966. This book argued that the logical outcome of accepting evolution was also accepting gender fluidity” (James 2019: 57). James quotes Benjamin,

Darwin’s theory has pointed up the identity of the male and female origins. Out of the same basic living molecules, there evolved different sex patterns, male

⁵⁶ Haig, D. (2000). Of sex and gender. *Nature Genetics*, 25(4), pp.373–373. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/78033>. [Accessed 19 Sep. 2022].

⁵⁷ Trueman and James are not alone in countering the idea of a gendered soul being trapped in the wrong body. However, atleast in transgender theology, this idea has been seen as outdated in the light of gender fluidity.

and female. Thus the old language of opposite sexes, derived from the theological mythology that God (male) created male and female as absolutely separate creatures, has been modified by modern biology. Out of the same molecules, the chemist can produce oestrogens and androgens ... Out of the same nucleic acids, the chromosomes that make a man or a woman are evolved. Medical arts can bring about the dramatic womanization of a man, or manization of a woman ... the progress of medical science and technology, I believe, will eventually make it possible to change a normal man into a normal woman with the capacity to become a reproducing other (James, 2019:57).

Benjamin typifies the coming together of secularism and therapeutic individualism, resulting in the transgender revolution.

Concurrent with Benjamin came the ideas that religion was sexually oppressive. These ideas were championed first by Wilhelm Reich.

Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957)

Reich was a psychoanalyst in the line of Freud, wanting to focus on the feeling of individuals in contrast to the suffocating oppression of society's expectations and norms. "He believed that the suffering and cruelty in society were due to the enforcement of Christian morality. Traditional marriage, he argued, wrongly deprived women and children of their sexual rights. Like Freud, he wanted to liberate people from shame. Also, like Freud, he promoted the idea that children should be able to engage in sexual activity" (James 2019: 58). Both Benjamin and Reich locate the oppression of individuals within Christian theology and its perceived sexual repression. The solution, in their minds, was secular, therapeutic individualism.

If Hirschfield, Benjamin and Reich were largely theoretical trail-blazers in transgenderism, John Money standing on their shoulders was probably the single most significant contributor to the acceptance and practical outworking of those ideas. Walsh writes, "Before John Money, there was a small group of people slouching their way forward towards gender theory and transgenderism... but it hadn't taken the shape of gender theory as we recognise it today. John Money was the one who put the pieces together" (Walsh, 2022: 39).

John Money (1921-2006)

Money was a psychiatry professor who championed and campaigned for the right of individuals to change their gender, along with advocating the decriminalisation of sex with children. Money was the co-founder of the John Hopkins Gender identity Clinic and came up with a theory that each of us is born a hermaphrodite, at least psychologically (Walsh, 2022:42). He hit the headlines in America in 1966 with a ground-breaking case of a ‘man who’d become a woman” (James 2019:59). Money was the pioneer of gender reassignment clinics and centres. In the UK, the Tavistock centre has been controversial over its treatment of children and adolescents and was given notice to close in August 2022. Money’s most famous case that was presented as a success story was of David Reimer, whose circumcision had gone wrong,

“Money asked David’s parents to agree to experimental surgery to ‘change’ the little boy into a little girl. Money wanted to test his idea that gender is about socialisation, not biology. If this boy could be brought up successfully as a girl, while his twin brother Brian was brought up as a boy, it would vindicate his theory. It was later revealed that Money had forced David (who was brought up as ‘Brenda’) to engage in incestuous acts with his brother” (James, 2019:59). Money hailed his experiment as a success; however, when David was a teenager and discovered what had happened, he insisted on reverting to his birth gender. As adults, both Brian and David committed suicide. Nevertheless, Money’s influence and effect on the promotion of transgenderism were sealed.

Our final consideration of individuals who have been prime movers in the transgender revolution is Robert Stoller. Stoller’s contribution was mainly toward the normalisation of sexual behaviour that was deemed unacceptable by society.

Robert Stoller (1924-1991)

In his book, *Sex and Gender*, Stoller insisted that sex was biological and gender social. He also distinguished gender identity (personal awareness of belonging to one sex and not the other) from gender role (the behaviour one displays in society). He challenged the idea that one can distinguish between normal and perverted sexual behaviour. For him, the only significant boundary is whether any form of sexual behaviour infringes on other people’s rights (James, 2019:60). It is noteworthy that this idea is now axiomatic

in society. An individual can do whatever they like as long as it doesn't hurt or infringe on the rights of someone else. This has been a key idea in the transgender movement finding traction. However, two considerations call this assumption into question. The first is education. When children are affirmed in a different sexual identity than their biological sex and set on a path for hormone treatment and even transitional surgery, it is highly debated as to whether this is not significantly detrimental to children.⁵⁸ Secondly, what happens when the rights of transgender individuals clash with those who do not hold the same ideological or theological beliefs? As already noted, the new identity politics, with its intersectional framework, sees all institutions that disagree as hateful and abusive and must be changed or overthrown. This is not the idea of 'you do you, and I'll do me'; instead, this is 'I'll do me, and you must support and agree with me.' It is what has been dubbed the "intolerance of the new tolerance"⁵⁹

Now that culture has settled into these ideas, it is arguable that Freud's observation, which did not hold the day, that the repressed community was preferable to the alternative chaos was a legitimate concern. Riots, unrest, and conflict between identity groups and perceived enemies have characterised the twenty-first century.

Returning to the second reversal in Reif, individuals no longer serve and find their identity in the activity of institutions, but rather institutions serve the individual and their sense of well-being. Institutions become "platforms for performance, where individuals are allowed to be their authentic selves precisely because they are able to give expression to who they are 'inside'" (Trueman, 2020:49). Trueman quotes Reif, "Reticence, secrecy, concealment of self have been transformed into social problems; once they were aspects of civility when the great Western formulary summed up in the credal phrase 'Know thyself' encouraged obedience to communal purposes rather than suspicious of them" (Trueman, 2020: 49). This observation is born out in our current experience in society where being 'who you are' or feel yourself to be, publicly is all important. Celebrities that "come out" as homosexual, pansexual, transgender are

⁵⁸ Transgender Trend. (2019). *Tavistock's Experimentation with Puberty Blockers: Scrutinizing the Evidence*. [online] Transgender Trend. Available at: <http://www.transgendertrend.com/tavistock-experiment-puberty-blockers> [Accessed 19 Sep. 2022].

⁵⁹ The term was first coined by D.A. Carson, a lecturer at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, author and speaker. It is the title of a book by the same author (Carson 2012). The term refers to a shift in meaning of the word, tolerance. Once meaning, the ability and willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions and behaviours that one dislikes or disagrees with; Carson argued that in current culture it means only tolerating an accepted narrative or position on pain of exclusion or ridicule.

celebrated in the media and held up as examples of brave authenticity. Celebrated transgender celebrities include Caitlyn Jenner, Elliot Page, Zaya Wade, Leyna Bloom, Kataluna Enriquez, who was the first transgender Miss World in 2021, Laverne Cox, Indya Moore, Hunter Schafer, Laura Jane Grace, Valentina Sampaio, Janet Mock, Chaz Bono, and Jazz Jennings.⁶⁰ This is in marked contrast to the concealment of previous expressions of culture.

Trueman goes on to note the effect on education where the classroom was once a place where ideas could be challenged and tested but is now a place where individuals need to be safe, protected and affirmed as the priority. Education has changed into the shape of the new therapeutic individualism. “That which hinders my outward expression of my inner feelings – that which challenges or attempts to falsify my psychological beliefs about myself and thus to disturb my sense of inner well-being – is by definition harmful and to be rejected. And that means that traditional institutions must be transformed to conform to the psychological self, not vice versa” (Trueman, 2020: 50). James reports that in 2017 “the National Union of Teachers in the U.K. called for toddlers as young as two to be taught about transgender issues” (James, 2019:102). James continues, “In many countries, schools are the ‘gateway’ by which gender theory can be promoted, whether under the guise of ‘sex education’ or ‘anti-bullying’ guidance” (James, 2019:102).

The implications of these two transformations in current culture for the evangelical church are startling and clear. Orthodox Christianity prioritises revealed objective truth and seeks to be God-centred rather than man-centred. It prioritises the needs of others and of the community over the self. These are entirely at odds with current culture and bring great pressure to bear on individual Christians and the church as a whole. The Church is seen as an institution that must be changed and transformed along with all other institutions. It is again evident why the latest expression of culture would see evangelical Christians as unloving and even hateful with its general dissent from therapeutic individualism. Can the new culture tolerate this dissent? It is not just members of the LGBTQ+ community that would answer – no, nor their allies in the anti-racism movement who purport critical theory. Feminists who are at odds with

⁶⁰ www.cbsnews.com. (n.d.). *Transgender celebs you need to know*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/transgender-celebrities-you-need-to-know/14/> [Accessed 22 Sep. 2022].

transgender ideology are equally ardent in the same cause. “The answer as to why dissent from the sexual revolution is to be eradicated is a simple one of political liberation. The oppressive nature of bourgeois society is built on repressive sexual codes that maintain the patriarchal nuclear family as the norm. As long as this state of affairs holds, there can be no true liberation, political or economic. Shattering sexual codes is, therefore, one of the principal emancipatory tasks of the political revolutionary” (James, 2019:51).

We have now come to the next contributory ideological movement to the current expression of the sexual revolution, viz. radical feminism. First, we will reflect on how therapeutic individualism has contributed to the rise of transgender theology.

Therapeutic Individualism’s Contribution to the Rise of Transgender Theology

Therapeutic individualism is concurrent with emotionalism. The therapeutic challenge to the church has been to orient its message and activities toward self-fulfilment. The challenge of individualism has been the effect of negating community life that is sacrificial and servant-hearted in favour of self-centeredness. New Testament discipleship includes a call to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus. The epistles flesh out the nature of this sacrificial life as service to others, seen in the one-another passages.⁶¹ Running alongside such service is the process of renewing Christians’ minds with biblical truth so that the ideas of the world, the flesh and the devil are replaced by the will of God. Conforming the mind to God’s revealed truth, resulting in ongoing repentance and faith, along with sacrificial service, in the context of shared community life is the essence of discipleship. This essence of conformity to the authority of Christ and submission of our will and desires to others is entirely different to therapeutic individualism.

However, it is apparent that therapeutic individualism, rather than being challenged by biblical discipleship, has received a welcome in the way churches organise themselves and practise spiritual formation. English comments, “One of the greatest challenges facing the church is discipleship that centres around the autonomous self... Bavinck’s claim that ‘God, and God alone, is man’s highest good’ could be contrasted by a

⁶¹ The ‘One Another’ Passages. (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.mmlearn.org/hubfs/docs/OneAnotherPassages.pdf>. [Accessed 10 Nov. 2022].

contemporary cultural mantra, ‘Self, and being true to yourself alone, is your highest good. We have replaced the transcendence of God with the transcendence of self.’⁶² He continues, “In this turn towards the self, the church has, perhaps both intentionally and unintentionally, tailored its discipleship to accommodate, and even perpetuate this cultural shift. In other words, it is not just the secularist promise that salvation is found in self-improvement, self-actualisation, and self-growth, but this is slowly becoming the promise in the church as well.” In contrast, English, commenting on Matthew 16, says, “If Jesus dies on a cross and Peter must follow Him there, then that is really going to get in the way of Peter’s self-actualisation. This is not what Peter wants to be – following Jesus to a cross is not being true to himself.”⁶³

Wells agrees with this assessment of contemporary discipleship and practice, as “It is hard to miss in the evangelical world – in the vacuous worship that is so prevalent, for example, in the shift from God to self as the central focus of faith, in the psychologised preaching that follows this shift, in the erosion of its conviction, in its strident pragmatism, in its inability to think incisively about the culture, in its revelling in the irrational” (Wells, 1992: 95). It is telling that these words are included in a chapter called ‘Things Fall Apart.’ Wells’ assessment of the effect of therapeutic individualism on the church is as insightful as it is damning. The result is not just, as Wells states, the loss of theology, in practice, in the evangelical church. It is the openness to non-evangelical beliefs and practices, such as transgenderism. Wells highlights a lack of conviction and pragmatism as the effects of this new individualism. A lack of conviction removes objectivity in evaluating new theologies and ideologies. Pragmatism is susceptible to embracing the culture’s definition of love and acceptance in order to fulfil the church’s mission both for discipleship and evangelism.

These are important insights for the rise and acceptance of transgender theology. Within liberal churches, there is no ultimate standard of truth by which culture can be meaningfully filtered. Within evangelical churches, there is such a standard, but the triumph of therapeutic individualism, at least in part, can negate that standard – in

⁶² Gospel-Centered Discipleship. (n.d.). *Self-Centered Discipleship—a Challenge to Deep Discipleship | GCD*. [online] Available at: <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/self-centered-discipleship-a-challenge-to-deep-discipleship> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2022].

⁶³ Gospel-Centered Discipleship. (n.d.). *Self-Centered Discipleship—a Challenge to Deep Discipleship | GCD*. [online] Available at: <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/self-centered-discipleship-a-challenge-to-deep-discipleship> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2022].

practice. Packer, therefore, argues for a return to the discipleship methods of previous generations in order to return spiritual formation to a biblical path (Packer, 2013: 38). This will be an important observation for when we formulate biblical responses.

4.5 RADICAL FEMINISM

The contribution of radical feminism to transgenderism lies in its role of seeking to diminish any distinction between men and women, male and female. Such an endeavour sets the stage and enables the blurring of the sexes and then their destruction. James demonstrates that as early as the 1960s second-wave feminists argued that “to maintain any gender distinctions propped up the edifice of oppressive ‘patriarchy’ (2019: 65). James quotes the radical feminist Judith Lorber, “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.” (2019: 65) How this contributes to and facilitates transgenderism is clear. Butler argued in, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) that the “binary framework of both sex and gender is just a fiction – made up by the oppressive class of heterosexual males, in order to maintain their advantage” (James, 2019: 66). A 2019 feminist article in the *Independent* Newspaper agrees, “Feminism isn’t just about becoming a @GirlBoss – it’s about analysing the ways that gender as a construct oppresses all of us”⁶⁴ James draws a straight line from this radical feminist ideology to a new emergent collective identity in the 1980s and 1990s of “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans” (James, 2019:66). The LGBT collective movement was born. The resultant Queer theory, James notes, believes it to be abusive to ‘assign’ people to one sex. “It is thought to be hateful not to allow people to choose (or ‘recognise’) their own unique identity” (James 2019:67). James observes that while most people would not be interested in the idea of gender fluidity, it has nevertheless permeated Western culture at astonishing speed. It has quickly become a new cultural orthodoxy.

⁶⁴ The Independent. (2019). *Opinion: The Slumflower may not want to acknowledge it but male suicide is a feminist issue.* [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/male-suicide-feminism-slumflower-mental-health-a8817886.html> [Accessed 18 Nov. 2022].

Ironically, there have been resultant clashes and fallouts between feminists and trans activists who were, developmentally, natural allies. Feminists have bemoaned biological male sports people identifying as female and participating in female sports.⁶⁵ This is an ongoing theme. In 1973 the keynote speaker at the West Coast Lesbian Conference, Robin Morgan, had boycotted a performance by a transsexual, Beth Elliott. Morgan said in her keynote speech,

I will not call a male “she”; thirty years of suffering in this androcentric society, and of surviving, have earned me the title ‘woman’; one walk down the street by a male transvestite, five minutes of him being hassled (which he may enjoy), and then he dares, he dares to think he understands our pain? No, in our mother’s names and in our own, we must not call him sister.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, radical feminism has played a significant role in men identifying as women; this is a problem of their own making. There has been some more moderate feminist pushback against the destruction of gender. Melanie Philipps notes that in 1977 the feminist Alice Rossi changed her position and warned of the dangers of the emerging unisex agenda. “She realised there had been an unholy alliance between feminists and social scientists who had both made the fundamental error of confusing equality with sameness and diversity with inequality” (Phillips, 1999:170). Rossi’s warning went unheeded, and the radical feminist agenda won the day.

The radical feminist ideology that seeks to destroy gender has not just remained in the academic field but has had a real-world pragmatic effect. Arguably one of the most significant effects has been the characterisation of masculinity as toxic and a resultant feminisation of maleness in society. In 2019 the *Independent* Newspaper ran a story highlighting this issue. On International Woman’s Day, the feminist author and influencer Chidera Eggeue, disputed in a tweet what a lady had said to her in person, that said “some young men have it so hard.” Eggerue replied in a tweet “men are murdering us and abusing children and you think I have time to theorise on why they

⁶⁵ Fowle (2022) (n.d.). *Speaking up on sex and gender is terrifying, but as a Christian and a woman, I can no longer keep quiet*. [online] Premier Christianity. Available at: <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/speaking-up-on-sex-and-gender-is-terrifying-but-as-a-christian-and-a-woman-i-can-no-longer-keep-quiet/13304.article> [Accessed 18 Nov. 2022].

⁶⁶ Goldberg, M. (2019). *What Is a Woman?* [online] The New Yorker. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/04/woman-2>. [Accessed 30 Nov. 2022].

can't cry? Lmaso not me hun.”⁶⁷ This is the narrative of toxic masculinity. Whether Eggeue was right or wrong in her assessment of the harmful effects of masculinity is beyond the scope of our research. However, the concept does seem to have played a role in the transgender revolution. The author states that feminists need to be aware that “Men are also more likely to struggle with addiction than women and remain underdiagnosed when it comes to poor mental health. It's a well-established fact that oppressive notions of masculinity – which shame men into silence and prevent them from seeking help.”⁶⁸ The author was referencing that the highest cause of death in men under forty-five is suicide, and the notion of toxic masculinity is a contributing factor.

If the radical feminist notion of toxic masculinity contributes to male suicide, then it is not far-fetched to see a link to men wanting to flee such stigma and being convinced by it, perhaps causing self-loathing. How do you escape? In the world of identity politics, you can leave the group of being a toxic villain (white male) and join the group of protected victims (women). The onslaught of the ideas of toxic masculinity has arguably made femininity more appealing to certain men or at least subconsciously had a feminising effect on men in Western Culture. This may make gender fluidity appealing to men of a more sensitive nature. It raises an important issue of identity in men and women, which we will consider in the next chapter. In a peer-reviewed publication from the Université De Geneve, the author states, “Before the feminist revolution in the late 1960s, men largely built their masculinity on traits that opposed those assigned to women. Since then, society has been moving towards gender equality, and men can no longer rely on this anti-feminine norm.”⁶⁹ The author is notably pro-feminism, homosexuality and transgenderism. The author notes that prior to 1968, masculinity had a clear definition in society and stood in contrast to what was classed as feminine, “above all, he had to be not feminine.” And show “he was not a woman.” The author quotes professor Falomir, “The more we even up the genders, the more difficult it is for ‘traditional men’ to manage this equality and continue to construct their own masculinity. As they can't

⁶⁷ The Independent. (2019). *Opinion: The Slumflower may not want to acknowledge it but male suicide is a feminist issue*. [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/male-suicide-feminism-slumflower-mental-health-a8817886.html> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2022].

⁶⁸ The Independent. (2019). *Opinion: The Slumflower may not want to acknowledge it but male suicide is a feminist issue*. [online] Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/male-suicide-feminism-slumflower-mental-health-a8817886.html> [Accessed 13 Dec. 2022].

⁶⁹ EurekaAlert! (n.d.). *The feminization of men leads to a rise in homophobia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.eurekaalert.org/news-releases/557771>. [Accessed 18 Dec. 2022].

differentiate themselves from women anymore.”⁷⁰ This seems to be a rather airbrushed view of the genders being evened up. It does not account for the radical, society-wide, feminist message of toxic masculinity. This idea vilifies the very nature of maleness, contributing to a crisis of masculinity.

The seemingly contradictory pressure on men is twofold, firstly to be less like men and, secondly, an innate fear of being feminine. Of course, being ‘feminine’ is now non-descript and slippery, as is being masculine. Philips quotes a fourteen-year-old boy's disconcertion, “Once upon a time there were men’s jobs and women’s jobs. Once upon a time there were coal miners, things like that. Now it’s in decline” (Phillips 1999: 10). Philips continues, “Boys were also sensitive to the way they were painted constantly as bad news, violent, aggressive and stupid, with ‘blokes’ the butt of jokes in sitcoms and adverts” (Phillips 1999:10) The result, Philips states, is that we are faced with a feminised culture where men either keep their heads down and play along, to their detriment, or act in stereotypical male behaviour. However, in transgenderism, the male with a loss of masculine identity can now seek to find that sense of self in a myriad of gender identities. Ironically with the victim narrative of radical feminism, girls may also likely find the prospect of identifying as male attractive.

Radical Feminism’s Contribution to the Rise of Transgender Theology

The concept of identity is key to spiritual formation in the Christian Church. Deep theological concepts that require reflection, belief, assimilation, and outworking are systemic to Christian growth. Central to these theological concepts is Union with Christ, which roots an individual concept of self and identity in their radical and permanent spiritual identification and connection with Christ. The cumulative effect of secularism, emotionalism and therapeutic individualism sets up Christians to find their identity within themselves rather than in Christ. And western culture gives the message that such identity is located within a person’s gender and sexuality. Radical feminism’s blurring of the sexes and destruction of gender arguably become a potential source of identity for Christians. The tension within the church between egalitarianism and

⁷⁰ EurekaAlert! (n.d.). *The feminization of men leads to a rise in homophobia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.eurekaalert.org/news-releases/557771>. [Accessed 18 Dec. 2022].

complementarianism has been the field on which the battle for locating a person's identity and value has been fought.

It is telling that churches that embrace transgender theology seem to be exclusively egalitarian. As previously considered, the current theological battle over the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father is taken up by both egalitarians and those promoting transgender theology. It would be a stretch to claim that the challenge to the eternal subordination is exclusively egalitarian, but that it has a feminist and resultant transgender interest and application is clear. Of course, the transgender application is an unintended consequence within evangelicalism. Egalitarianism seeks to conflate theologically traditional roles of men and women within the church. This is not to say that some redress and rebalance of women's roles have not been entirely necessary. It is patently apparent that many churches have restricted the role of women beyond any biblical justification. However, the concept of egalitarianism has had an enabling role in transgender theology, even if it was an unintended consequence.

There is much more that could be said about the circumstances in society and within the church that have enabled the rise and formulation of transgender theology. Soughers locates the rise of transgender theology in liberation theology and the Queer biblical studies of the 1990s. (2018:37-44). However, for the purpose of our research, these are perhaps the result of what we have identified as enabling movements and individuals and not causal. Additionally, we have not had space to consider the powerful role of the liberal media in social imagining and its contribution to constructing the current cultural narrative. This, too, affects Christians who are not immune to such emotive and constant messaging.

4.6 CULTURAL, LIBERTARIAN OR NEO-MARXISM

We began this chapter with Tinker's contention that Western culture had been taken over by neo, or cultural Marxism. We return to Tinker's definition of the same:

Libertarian Marxism is all about liberating humanity from the social institutions and conditions (like the family and church and business and traditional values and habits and authorities) that prevent the individual from realising his true self, his true desires and aspirations, from being anything he wants to be - full

autonomy... Libertarian Marxism is the Marxism of our culture, of our time (Tinker, 2018:46).

We have seen that the cultural threads of secularism, emotionalism, therapeutic individualism and radical feminism, in both their cause-and-effect relationship to the sexual revolution – including transgenderism, do indeed result in and validate Tinker's claim. This is not a surprise, with Marxist university groups now posting and advertising their meetings on Facebook.⁷¹ Christian theology, ethics and conduct run in the opposite direction to neo-Marxist ideology, making the formulation of an evangelical response both essential and urgent.

We now turn to the task of evaluating transgender theology itself within a biblical, evangelical framework.

⁷¹ Loughborough University has its own Marxist society: lsu.co.uk. (n.d.). *Marxist - Loughborough Students' Union*. [online] Available at: <https://lsu.co.uk/societies/Marxist> [Accessed 20 Dec. 2022].

CHAPTER 5: EVALUATING TRANSGENDER THEOLOGY

Before looking at individual texts and arguments to evaluate the exegetical validity of transgender theology, we will need to consider in more detail scriptural approaches to the subject. As noted above, Soughers approvingly quotes Spong in terms of his approach to the Apostle Paul's understanding of homosexuality. This was telling on both Spong's and Soughers' view of the inspiration of Scripture and the inerrancy of Scripture. If Paul was wrong because he did not have a modern understanding of sexual orientation, then what he wrote is neither inspired nor inerrant. This is a troubling approach as an argument can be made that recognising the Bible as the very words of God is a sign of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and thus a Christian in the Biblical sense. Jesus said, "my sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me."⁷² Today, Christ's voice is heard primarily in the words of Scripture. In contrast, Paul says, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."⁷³ In other words those who do not have the Spirit of God indwelling them (a Christian) will neither accept God's words as coming from Him, nor accept their meaning. Grudem quotes the Westminster Confession of faith,

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts (chap. 1. Para. 5)" (Grudem, 2020:68).

⁷² John 10:27

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 2:14

Conservative Evangelical Christians would have serious doubts as to whether liberal theologians, while spending much of their time with the text of Scripture, are what the Bible would classify as Christians. For example, Grudem concludes with Machen, “Liberalism is not Christianity. It is another religion altogether” (Grudem, 2020:79). In order to keep this dissertation within manageable proportions, the main focus will be on studies that are written from an evangelical perspective in terms of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

Not all the writers of transgender theology assume a liberal view of Scripture. Some seem to hold to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture but depart, to varying degrees, from conservative evangelicalism in the concept of Scripture alone. Baldock, for example, puts greater weight on historical background as being interpretively decisive. When considering Romans 1, Baldock looks at the issue of stoicism and how this philosophy demanded that people harmonise with society and that somehow this lack of harmonising is in Paul’s mind. There is more to Baldock’s argument which we will come back to but we note that this is a different approach to conservative evangelicalism which does make use of the grammatical, historical hermeneutical method. So, what is the difference? The reformation principles of Scripture alone, the analogy of Scripture and the perspicuity of Scripture mean that the Lord has ensured that you do not need outside knowledge to arrive faithfully at the correct interpretation of Scripture. If this were not so then understanding the Bible would be reserved for those in the academy. Other authors put decisive weight on extra-biblical texts, whether Jewish or otherwise. Grudem brings a much-needed balance,

“of course, asking about the words of situations that may lie ‘behind’ a text of Scripture may at times be helpful to us in understanding what the text means. Nevertheless, our speculations about the original Aramaic words, the thoughts that were in Paul’s mind, or the various church situations can never replace or compete with the words of Scripture itself as our final authority, nor should we allow them to ever contradict or call into question the accuracy of any of the words of Scripture” (Grudem 2020:77).

This holds true for attempts made in overriding the analogy of Scripture and perspicuity of Scripture in favour of non-canonical documents. Sabia-Tanis seems to put such weight on extra-biblical Jewish writings. Unlike liberal theologians, these writers do

present biblical arguments, but we want to be clear about our approach to evaluating these arguments. Secondary sources, while adding some value cannot be determinative or overrule the plain reading of Scripture when exegeted in its context and confirmed by other Scriptures.⁷⁴ We will be careful to make this distinction as we progress.

There are also those who claim a Reformed view of Scripture in the way described but whose personal experience has caused them to question conservative evangelical positions. Brownson writes,

But here is the point from this personal story: that dramatic shock to my life forced me to reimagine how Scripture speaks about homosexuality. The text had not changed, but my assumptions about what they were self-evidently saying was put to the test. My core reformed commitment to the centrality of Scripture had not changed; but I needed to confront the equally reformed conviction that the church must always be reforming itself according to the word of God (Brownson, 2013:12-13).

The dramatic shock of which Brownson speaks was his son declaring himself to be homosexual. It is yet to be seen whether this dramatic shock enhanced or clouded the exegetical process for Brownson.

5.1 THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

As we have seen, one of the most far-reaching implications of transgender theology is not, first of all, its effect on those who identify as such or in how the Church responds to them. Rather, the most serious implication is in our understanding of the character, nature and essence of God. Sabia-Tanis sees God as being both male and female by nature (2018:55-61). Although Sabia-Tanis does not see this as a binary nature within God but rather a spectrum. (2018:55-61). As previously noted, this affects worship and our understanding of God Himself. To not worship God according to how He reveals Himself is idolatry and a serious matter for the Church. A second aspect of transgender theology that poses a serious challenge to evangelical theology is the assertion that

⁷⁴ Analogia Scriptura is a hermeneutic from the reformation period, although found in Scripture (Acts 17:11) that insists that the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself.

God's nature changes. We will consider the arguments. This argument is used to support the idea of gender fluidity. The third aspect of the doctrine of God that we must attend to is the relational structure within the Trinity. Transgender theology sees the disruption of any gender binary assertions coming from a re-ordering of our understanding of the relationships within the Trinity (Soughers, 2018:81).

The Essence of God's Nature

Genesis 1:26 states, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." Sabia-Tanis comments, "God uses plural language to refer to 'Godself' in this passage, stating that humanity is made 'in our image' and 'after our likeness.' Scholars debate the reason for the use of the plural." Sabia-Tanis then lists some options before favouring Holly Boswell, "The use of the plural could refer to the plurality of God's own being – male, female, and beyond – which is broader than what we can understand in a single term or gender. Holly Boswell states in her article "The Spirit of Transgender, Adam mirrored an androgynous God before the split into Eve." Drawing out the implication Sabia-Tanis quotes Fewell and Gunn,

On the other hand, when the account reaches a climax with the creation of humankind, that is, the creature in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-30), we see movement against that desire to differentiate. Blurring the binary poles, God desires to create likeness or sameness, to recreate self, a desire impossible to achieve. Equally interesting are the sharp edges of God's naming. The binary impulse is there very clearly. Yet, in all this careful defining, separating and opposing, there is a curious slippage. God 'himself' is unsure whether he is plural or singular... significantly the slippage extends from the God(s) to the human(s) created in his/their image..." (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:57).

This is a remarkable assertion - that God is unsure of the nature of His own being. The suggestion seems to be that this extends to the plurality in terms of both the Trinity and in terms of gender. This presents a confused God and seems, at first glance, to be a projection of a human being's gender confusion and discomfort onto God Himself. Our first question to address is whether it is reasonable or not to translate Genesis 1v26 as a plural of Gender in the being of God?

5.2 DOES GENESIS 1:26 TEACH A PLURAL GENDER FOR GOD?

Our starting point is to look at plural language for God prior to Genesis 1:26, and that takes us to the first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth.”⁷⁵ *Elohiym* (God) is in the plural form. Within evangelicalism, there are varied interpretations. Firstly, there is the “Royal we” interpretation. Stemming from the idea that Queen Victoria used to refer to herself as ‘we’, i.e. “We are not amused.” This did not mean that Queen Victoria was plural, but it was an idiom of royalty expressing importance.⁷⁶ However, as Swain points out, this “lacks evidence of being an idiomatic expression in the near east”⁷⁷ Does this contradict our preliminary assertion that extra-biblical material cannot be decisive in interpretation? We would have to answer no. There is nothing in the context that would suggest that the “Royal we” is being used, idiomatically or otherwise. Extra-biblical customs, idioms, and literature may confirm an interpretation that does not violate sound hermeneutical principles, but it may not provide a novel interpretation. Additionally, as Grudem states in relation to Genesis 1:26, “In Old Testament Hebrew, there are no other examples of a monarch using plural verbs or plural pronouns of Himself in such a ‘plural of majesty,’ so this suggestion has no evidence to support it” (Grudem, 2020:270).

Secondly, some scholars note that while the subject, God, is plural, the verb, create, is singular. In this interpretation, the plural is used to emphasise that God alone was responsible for creation. It was ‘God’s creation.’ (Grudem, 2020:270) We must look to the context of Genesis 1:1 to find greater clues to its interpretation. Do we find such clues? In verse 2, we read, “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” And verse 3, “And God said let there be light.” Using the interpretive principle of the analogy of Scripture, we can understand God speaking in v3 in the light of John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word with God and the Word was God.” Colossians 1:16, speaking of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, “All things were created through Him and for Him.” Therefore, three persons who are God are mentioned in Genesis 1:1-3. Of course, the nature of revelation is progressive, and so it is right to use more explicit passages, like John 1:1, to gain an understanding of

⁷⁵ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV version of the Bible.

⁷⁶ Swain, S. (n.d.). *Is the Trinity in Genesis 1?* [online] The Gospel Coalition. Available at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/trinity-genesis-1/>. [Accessed 13 Jan. 2023].

⁷⁷ Swain, S. (n.d.). *Is the Trinity in Genesis 1?* [online] The Gospel Coalition. Available at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/trinity-genesis-1/>. [Accessed 13 Jan. 2023].

other passages. Interpreting Old Testament passages in the light of the fuller revelation in the New Testament is an important principle. B.B. Warfield gives a pertinent analogy,

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lit; introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus, the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it, but only perfected, extended, enlarged” (Warfield, 2003:141-142).

Warfield’s emphasis on the New Testament not correcting the Old Testament but rather illuminating and providing the understanding of it is entirely right. A New Testament understanding of the Old cannot do violence to the context of the Old Testament passage but rather illuminate depths that were concealed. Of course, there are ways in which Jesus and the Apostles provide and elaborate on the meaning of Old Testament passages which, if we were to do, would seem to stretch this principle. However, they were giving inspired revelation.

The most natural understanding of Elhoiym in Genesis 1v1, in its context and wider biblical context would clearly be a pointer to the Trinity. That is to say, that the plural refers to the number of members of the Trinity, Father, Son (Word) and Holy Spirit. Swain concludes. “Genesis 1 serves the main purpose of holy Scripture, which is to promote union and communion between the Holy Trinity and the people created, redeemed and perfected for Himself.” With this in mind, we can now come to Genesis 1:26-27,

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.

As previously noted, Sabia-Tanis believes this verse to mean that God’s gender is plural. In other words, if man is made in God’s image and God made male and female, then God must be male and female. Although, the suggestion is implied that God’s gender is on a spectrum that includes, but is not limited to, male and female. Quoting Boswell, Sabia-Tanis writes, “Adam mirrored an androgynous God before the split into

Eve.” (2018:57). However, as we have already seen, the plural language in Genesis 1 is a foundation for the Trinity. The use of plural pronouns in v26, ‘us’ and ‘our’ are not intended to be used in the same way transgendered people use pronouns today. While a transgender person may refer to themselves with a plural pronoun speaking of themselves as one person, Genesis 1:26 is speaking of an actual plural of persons in the Godhead. Those persons, as we have seen, are included in the context of the passage. This is confirmed by looking at the use of plural pronouns for God after verses 26-27.

Genesis 3:22 states, “Behold the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.” Here God refers to Adam as the ‘man’ and refers to Himself with the plural pronoun, us. As this only refers to Adam, and also not to Adam before the creation of Eve, referred to as the androgynous ‘earth creature’ in transgender theology, the use of the divine pronoun is obviously that of a number of persons, not of a number of genders. Grudem concludes, “We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete doctrine of the Trinity, but it is implied that more than one person is involved” (2020:270). Other such examples include Isaiah 6:8, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And Genesis 11:7, “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language.” The Lord is evidently talking to other members of the Trinity. Therefore, the plural language in Genesis referring to God is not, exegetically, a reference to God’s varied genders but to the number of persons in the Godhead.

There is a philosophical argument that we must take into account and evaluate. If people are made in the image of God, and God made people male and female, does it, therefore, mean that God must be male and female? The argument is seen more clearly when the same principle is applied to the problem of the origin of evil. This is not the question of why God allows suffering and evil. R.C. Sproul explained it as the problem of something being in the effect that is not present in the cause. So, if the world exists and the world contains evil, and God created the world, then God as the cause must also be evil. Sproul answers this so-called theodicy by pointing out that evil is a “falling short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)⁷⁸. This falling short is a subtraction from creation, not an addition. And so, just as darkness is the absence of light, so evil

⁷⁸ www.youtube.com. (n.d.). *RC Sproul - The Problem of the Origin of Evil*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1zoXOCUZ8Q> [Accessed 02 Feb. 2023].

is the absence of good. It is to remove something from creation, not add something to it. This solution eliminates the idea that God must be evil for evil to exist. However, while this is a satisfying solution, it falls short in terms of its scope. To accept the logical argument, to begin with would be to say that God must be male and female in order to create male and female. Is this true?

Aristotelian logic is not the yardstick by which God is measured. A simple rebuttal is to point out that God is Spirit and yet He created matter. God created ex-nihilo, out of nothing, and created what did not exist in His own being. It is, therefore, not a necessity that God is gendered as both male and female because He created male and female. This would be to put the cart before the horse and to make God in man's image. We cannot reduce God to our own methods and approaches to epistemology. We would do well to heed Isaiah 55:8-9. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Having removed the necessity for God to be gendered as human beings are, we now need to consider the language of gender that we find in the Scriptures as it pertains to God.

5.3 THE GENDER OF GOD

Transgender theologians and writers have mixed views on the gender of God. Paige asks, "If the Adam is made in the image of God what does this also tell us about the image of God? An androgynous, fully male and fully female? A genderless golem? It is not a stretch to argue that God is intersex or non-binary, between or beyond what we think of as male or female" (2019: 29). Sabia-Tanis postulates,

Yet an intersex or transgendered image of God, one that embodies both male and female, is more biblically accurate than one that forces God into a single-gendered box... People who speak of God as fully and wholly male ignore those parts of sacred texts that refer to God in feminine terms. The intersexed nature of God is thus hidden from the view of worshippers and believers as certainly as we conceal the evidence of intersexed or transgendered humans. The time has come to tell the truth about God even as we tell our own truths. (2018: 137-138).

However, Paige notes that there are dissenters in the pro-transgender camp towards these ideas. Paige quotes Mollenkott, “We cannot argue... that God is literally androgynous or intersexual, any more than we can depict God as literally male or literally female. But neither can we claim... that our current male-female polarisation is based on the image of God. It isn’t.” (2019:100). In the end, Paige concludes that it is not for us to categorise God. However, it seems clear this is precisely what Paige is doing and leans towards. Is God gendered? must be our next question.

Our starting point is that God, in His essence, is Spirit.⁷⁹ This notifies us that we cannot think of God in the same way that we think of our own embodied experience. Of course, the exception is the incarnation and the God-Man Christ Jesus, who is both the second person of the Trinity and, as such eternal Spirit and human being. As such, Jesus was gendered as male and lived as a man. He was circumcised on the eighth day after His birth,⁸⁰ which meant that He was both physically male and treated as male. We will return to this later to evaluate suggestions that Jesus was somehow on the transgender spectrum. Nevertheless, God, in His essence, is not like us, and therefore, He communicates His own character and being in ways that we can understand. The technical term that is used is anthropomorphism. This describes God in human terms that we can comprehend and relate to. Grudem states, “Many of these names (of God) are taken from human experience and emotions in order to describe parts of God’s character, while many other names are taken from the rest of natural creation.” (2020: 187).

Quoting Bavinck, Grudem lists names and emotions used for God from human experience:

Bridegroom	Isaiah 61:10
Husband	Isaiah 54:5
Father	Deuteronomy 32:6
Judge and king	Isaiah 33:22
Man of war	Exodus 15:3
Builder and maker	Hebrews 11:10

⁷⁹ John 4:24
⁸⁰ Luke 2:21

Shepherd	Psalm 23:1
Physician	Exodus 15:26

Grudem gives a representative rather than an exhaustive list. We can add to this list names and descriptions that use feminine language. A common theme is the tender care and love of God that describes God to be like a mother,

Isaiah 66:13

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 32:18

You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.”

Isaiah 49:15

Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

In the parable of the lost coin, God is compared to a woman on a frantic search.⁸¹ Even Jesus compares Himself to a Hen who desires to gather and protect her chicks.⁸² However, there is no sense in which Jesus is actually a Hen or a woman on a search. Just as God is not an actual lion (Isaiah 31:4), the sun (Psalm 84:11), the morning star (Revelation 22:16), a fountain (Psalm 36:9), or a rock (Deuteronomy 32:4). The purpose of all these terms is to describe God, His character and being in ways in which finite human beings can understand. If we were to take gender language for God literally, we would have to take all of the other descriptions of God literally. There would have to be a literal rock in heaven who was God. It is entirely wrongheaded to attribute literal gender to God other than in the incarnation. However, what we do see is that having made men and women in a particular way, the Lord then describes his being in those particular ways. While the feminist and transgender theologians would not accept it, there are particular traits that are male and female that God then uses to describe Himself. For physical strength, God uses male language of Himself. For nurturing love

⁸¹ Luke 15:8-10
⁸² Matthew 23:37

and kindness, the Lord often uses feminine language for Himself. Berkhof states, “In order to make Himself known to man, God had to condescend to the level of man, to accommodate Himself to the limited and finite human consciousness, and to speak in human language.” (2011:47-48)

It is important to look shortly at what it means to be made in the image of God but suffice it to say at this point that there is a cart and horse to recognise when it comes to gender language and God. The Lord designed men and women to have differing, complementary characteristics. Women display some characteristics of God more than men do, in general. And Men display some characteristics of God more than women do, in general. However, it is to make God in our own image to try then and gender Him in any kind of literal way.

What about pronouns for God? God and the biblical authors use, He and Him in the Bible, and the theme of Father is dominant. To use gender-neutral language, like Godself, or to use predominantly female language like, she, is to obscure God’s self-revelation and to alter Scripture. However, we are to use terms like Father in the same way as we would say, “God is my rock and my fortress.” (Psalm 18:2). No literal rock is implied, and no literal gender is implied. However, in wanting to demonstrate the principle of anthropomorphic language in the Bible, we must be careful that we do not eradicate or explain away any mystery that is contained within the Trinity. For example, the question of the eternal Sonship of the Son of God. It is right to notice that Jesus prays to the Father as the Son (John 17:3) and, in that context, speaks of their eternal relationship (John 17:5). We note that the high-priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 was either prayed in the presence of the disciples or revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. The prayer was meant to be understood and inscripturated for the encouragement of God’s people throughout the ages. This being the case, the language of Father and Son, no doubt, at the very least, is used for our benefit and understanding. However, systematic theology contains the concept of the eternal generation of the Son of God (John 5:26). Augustine wrote, “The Father remains life, the Son also remains life; the Father, life in Himself, the Son life in Himself, but from the Father. [The Son was] begotten by the Father to be life in Himself, but the Father is life in Himself, unbegotten.” (Rettig, 2013:13,19) Modern systematic theologies refer to this as the Son eternally proceeding from the Father, or “eternal generation” (Grudem, 2020:296). We are careful

to note the eternal aspect of this procession within the Godhead so that it is entirely correct to affirm that the Son of God was not created but is in essence God. Mystery indeed.

There is a relationship between the Father and the Son that is analogous, in some regard, to human parenthood. How much of this language is anthropomorphic and how much is inherent to the Godhead is difficult to ascertain. We can say that any reflection of this relationship in human parenthood is as much contrast as it is similitude. And given that the majority, if not all, of the descriptive language of the Godhead is clearly anthropomorphic, we are on safe ground assuming that the masculine, parental and offspring language are for our understanding. The nature of the Trinity is something that theologians can state but not fully explain; there are aspects that have no parallels, including eternal generation, within creation. We conclude then that the Lord uses even 'Father and Son' language to condescend within human language to describe what cannot be fully grasped by finite creatures.

In summary, the arguments for the nature of God being transgender, and the use of plural pronouns by God to refer to multiple genders, find no warrant or support in Scripture. The exercise is one of eisegesis, that is, reading into the text what a person brings to it, rather than exegesis. This is in an error of first importance, relating to the very nature and worship of God Himself. To state, as Sabia-Tanis does, that God is unsure whether He is singular or plural is, at best, to make God in your own image.

Before leaving the nature of God, we must also consider the concept of hierarchy within the Trinity and how transgender theology seeks to re-order Trinitarian relationships. As we have already noted, transgender authors seek to give priority to the Holy Spirit, who is seen as more gender neutral in order to "disrupt the gender binary" (Soughers, 2018: 81).

5.4 HIERARCHY WITHIN THE TRINITY

Soughers, along with feminist theologians, sees any hierarchy within the Trinity as a cause of oppressive patriarchal structures and the lack of any feminine concepts as concealing the transgendered nature of God. (2018:79). In re-ordering Trinitarian relationships, Soughers suggests, we will more clearly see God and transgender people will be seen as best imaging Him (1018:78). Soughers asks, "How then does giving

priority to the Spirit disrupt the gender binary?” (2018:81). Quoting Coakly, she answers “It is the very threeness of God, I shall argue, transformatively met in the Spirit, which gives the key to a view of gender that is appropriately founded in bodily practices of prayer, by giving the Spirit equal voice with the Father and the Son, it disrupts that binary, reminding us that the heart of God is one and three, but never two, and therefore challenges all binaries. The focus shifts from the male Father/Son relationship to something more complex, and this complexity has implications for humans made in the likeness of God. Twoness, one might say, is divinely ambushed by threeness.” (Soughers, 2018:81). At this point Soughers departs from Coakly who wants to hold onto two genders, and see’s Coakly’s argument as the foundation for many genders.

It is appropriate to ask how is the hierarchal gender language in the Trinity disrupted within Trans-theology? Soughers wants to begin with renaming the Trinity along with the suggestion of Tonstad, “The Spirit is the power of God, the Son is the glory of God, and the Father is the name of God, which is love.” (2018:90). In a twist and contradiction of other transgender authors, Sougher supports this view by writing,

“Traditional theologians often argue against attempts to refer to God with feminine names by saying that God is not gendered. However, if God is not gendered, then we do not need to express the relationship between the persons of the Trinity in gendered ways. Non-gendered language for God removes the foundation for many arguments about men’s superiority and women’s inferiority. It also helps to reduce human focus upon the gender of others (in the name of God) and allows people in the name of God in a multitude of ways that do not require them to identify only with one gender and its associated roles” (2018:90-91).

Ironically, Soughers suggests that this removes the temptation of idolatry when we think of the person of God (2018: 90-91). However, the nature of idolatry is to make and describe God in ways that we wish rather than in the ways and language that He uses. The fact that Jesus always talks about God as His Father and prays to Him as His Father,⁸³ and that the Father declares publicly about Jesus, “This is my beloved Son”⁸⁴ torpedoed Sougher’s and Tonstad’s proposed theology out of the water. And it is not

⁸³ John 17:1

⁸⁴ Matthew 3:17

only how the Father and Son address and relate to each other, but how we are to relate to them. Jesus, when teaching us how to pray, instructs us to address the Lord as “Our Father”⁸⁵ He tells us that the Father Himself loves us,⁸⁶ not that the Father’s name is love but that we are loved by the Father. Of course, it is true to say that God is love;⁸⁷ but this is to say that God is the essence of love, not His title or name.

What of the Holy Spirit? Soughers argues that the Spirit is not gendered as the term *pneuma* is neuter in Greek. As we have already seen, gender language for God is anthropomorphic. However, masculine personal pronouns are indeed used for the Holy Spirit (John 16:8,13). The biblical author uses *ekeinōs* which is masculine, if he wanted a neuter expression *ekeino* was available. Soughers insists that theology is important because it affects people’s lives. (2018:90). With this we agree; however, it is entirely backward to start with human experience and relationships in order to formulate our theology rather than allowing God to describe Himself in Scripture.

5.5 ETERNAL SUBORDINATION

The desire within transgender theology to remove any sense of hierarchical relationships within the Trinity finds some traction within evangelical circles in a current controversy over the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. That is to say, that the Son of God was not only subordinate to the Father during His incarnation but rather eternally subordinate. Ovey draws attention to the heated nature of the debate observing that those holding to eternal subordination are charged with the heresy of Arianism. That is to say that if the Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, they cannot be equal and therefore the Son must be created. A serious charge indeed (Ovey, 2016:1). Ovey outlines other practical implications of the controversy that consist of women’s ordination and how men and women relate to each other. It is beyond the scope of this research to engage fully with that debate, however, that it impacts the claims of transgender theology is clear. Ovey did not anticipate an application wider than egalitarian and complementarian issues, but some attention is warranted within our research. The disruption of hierarchy within transgender theology goes hand in hand with the disruption of any gender language attributed to God.

⁸⁵ Matthew 6:9

⁸⁶ John 16:27

⁸⁷ 1 John 4:7

In line with the desire of transgender theologians to make intimate relationships incompatible and contrary to power, authority and hierarchy, Ovey observes a strong objection to eternal subordination,

No obedience at all. Thus some argue that the Son does not obey the Father at all, whether in the incarnation or not. Moltmann points to Jesus' use of the 'Abba' term. For Moltmann this indicates two things: First 'Abba' shows intense intimacy between the Father and the Son. This aspect of Moltmann's argument is of course largely uncontroversial and advocates of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father would happily agree. The sting comes in Moltmann's second point about 'Abba': this is to say that intimacy between the Father and the Son excludes authority between Father and Son (Ovey, 2016:6).

Ovey continues, "In effect, Moltmann has an antithesis between power/authority on the one hand and relation and personal intimacy on the other. Each rules out the other. Most sharply, 'obedience and submission' are excluded by 'love and free participation'. (2016:7) In short, obedience and ontological reality are exclusive and incompatible.

At this point, we return again to a tension between philosophy and theology. Ordinarily and used correctly, philosophy can bring helpful tools to theology. However, as we have seen previously in the discussion on whether the effect of gender can be absent from the cause of God's being and nature, mere Aristotelian logic is not sufficient. God, not containing matter, created matter. Philosophical arguments fall short of the scriptural evidence for the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father. For example, in John 14:28 Jesus states, "...if you loved me you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." D A Carson observes, "although the verse assumes the distinction between the Father in His glory and the Son in His incarnation, nevertheless this verse also attests to the pattern of functional subordination of the `son to the Father... that extends backwards into eternity past" (1991:508).

Grudem marshals an impressive array of biblical evidence, which is summarised below (Grudem, 2020:302-303):

- a. The Father acts as leader before Creation and after Final Judgment.

- b. The eternal names of Father and Son indicate differences in the relationship. In the
- c. biblical world, the Father had the leadership role, even when the child becomes an adult.
- d. The Father chose us in the Son “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4), indicating an eternal action in which the Father leads and initiates.
- e. The Father created the world “through the Son” (Hebrews 1:2). The Father has the primary role.
- f. The Father gives His only Son (John 3:16) and “sent forth His Son into the world” (Galatians 4:4), which means that before the incarnation, the Son obeyed the Father.
- g. Eternal generation (as already stated) means that the Son is eternally from the Father, which requires some kind of priority of the Father over the Son.
- h. While Jesus was on earth, He always obeyed His Father. (John 6:38, 8:29)
- i. In heaven, Jesus is now interceding for us to the Father. (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25) which means He is petitioning the Father on our behalf.
- j. After His ascension, Jesus received authority to pour out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33).
- k. Jesus received revelation from the Father to give to John after His ascension (Revelation 1:1)
- l. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3), which is the position of secondary authority.
- m. He has received authority to execute the final judgement (John 5:26-27)
- n. After the final judgement, He will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father, and then for all eternity, “the Son Himself will be subjected to Him who put all things in subjection under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Grudem then observes that this pattern of the Father’s authority and the Son’s obedience is never reversed in Scripture, it flows in one direction (2020:303).

Ovey then answers the charge that eternal subordination is a recent and novel interpretation through an admirable historical investigation (Ovey, 2016:2-74) that is outside the scope of our research. Ovey does engage with the philosophical arguments regarding power and authority being mutually exclusive to intimacy and relationship. While we see this as unnecessary, we note his response that perfect relationships that

are not tainted by sin are immune to the charge (Ovey, 2016:125-126). It is clear that any attempt to challenge the hierarchal nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son, both in evangelical controversy and in transgender theology, is without biblical warrant.

5.6 DOES GOD'S NATURE CHANGE?

We must continue with a brief consideration in the area of the doctrine of God which concerns the assertion that God's nature changes. We noted in our overview of transgender theology that such a postulation is used to affirm the potentially changing gender identities of transgender people. Soughers, echoing Sabia-Tanis, states, "If the creation is made in the image of God, then the constantly changing nature of the universe, with its swirling atoms and continually dying and resurrecting forms, reflects God's changing nature." (2018:183). Soughers does back-peddle somewhat but unconvincingly having stated the above. Transgender writers find friends in authors like Clarke Pinnock, and his openness of God theology. Interestingly, Pinnock's ideas are also used in arguments against the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father.

Is it correct to say that God's swirling and changing creation points to a changing God? We are, again, unable to engage fully with the question because of the limits of our research; however, we can say the following.

1. All creation is not said in Scripture to be made in God's image. Human beings are uniquely made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). The rest of creation points to its Creator. The Heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). And there is enough evidence in creation for God's existence so that all are without excuse (Romans 1:20). However, outside of human beings, creation is never said to be made in God's image. As we have seen, it is fallacious to assert that God cannot create anything that is not contained in His being.
2. Sin has had a cosmological effect (Romans 8:22-23). If the wider creation were made in the image of God, it would be extremely difficult to unpick original creation from current cosmological realities. For this reason, there has always been debate over what it means for man to be made in God's image. Of course, the death and resurrection of Christ also have a cosmological effect as all things will be renewed, and we will, one day, see creation in all its splendour.

Therefore, without having to re-state and defend the well-established immutability of God's nature, we can easily dismiss the transgender attack on that doctrine as it fails on its own merits. We cannot justify changing genders by ascribing changeableness to God. It does not stand.

5.7 THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Our final consideration in the doctrine of God concerns the person of Christ Himself. In speaking of Christ, we mean the second person of the Trinity in His incarnated form while on earth, not in eternity. From an evangelical standpoint, accounts and formulations of the Lord Jesus contained within transgender theology make for difficult reading.

Paige, in a section entitled Genetic Jesus, offers a variety of options on the sexuality and identity of Christ.

A more speculative treatment asks just how OtherWise was Jesus? It was likely that Jesus was called a eunuch (at least as a slur) because he was an unmarried adult male. Rather than deny this reality, Jesus aligned himself closely with eunuchs in Matthew 19:11-12. Nonetheless, many have speculated about Jesus, including those who suggest he had a gay lover, the beloved disciple (perhaps Lazarus). Others believe that the intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene was consummated with marriage, sexual intercourse, and a child. In each case, speculation extrapolates from dynamics that are embedded in the text" (Paige, 2019:138).

Two things are of immediate note in Paige's speculations about the sexuality of Christ. Firstly, a common device by transgender authors seems to be the quoting of different fringe views that suggests that the sexual identity of Christ is a mainstream open question. Such speculation is not fully committed to by the author, but the intended effect of opening possibilities to the reader seems intended to prepare them for and make more reasonable the authors own assertions. Secondly, that these speculations come from "dynamics that are embedded in the text" (Paige, 2019:138), without any exegesis of specific texts gives the impression of biblical support without actual textual evidence. We will argue that even when the text of Scripture is used that a person-

centred rather than God-centred approach to exegesis assures transgender authors of finding in the text what they are looking for.

Paige continues by approvingly citing Edward Kessel, who published a thesis on the virgin birth. Kessel argued for the virgin birth to be the product of parthenogenesis. That is a-sexual reproduction. “In parthenogenic reproduction, there is no male sperm to fertilise the egg” (Paige, 2019:138). Paige continues, “Jesus should have had XX or XO chromosomes if he was conceived parthenogenetically... Kessel considers the possibility that Mary... may have had an intersex genetic variation that could provide a Y chromosome to the parthenogenetic process” (Paige, 2019:138). At this point, we ask where this line of reasoning is intended to take us? Paige provides the answer, “de la Chappelle, XX male sex reversal syndrome frequently results in typically male infant genitals and sometimes small testes and breast development in puberty. ...Jesus may have had a more effeminate puberty than we would typically assume, which could have further contributed to his being called a eunuch. While most readers assume that Jesus identified himself as a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, in Matthew 19:12, this biological analysis suggests that he might also have been a eunuch from birth” (2019:139).

In typical fashion, Paige goes from wide speculation on Christ’s sexuality to what is meant to be a reasonable, scientific explanation of the virgin birth that leaves Jesus and Mary as transgender or intersex. The established, scriptural view that the virgin birth was a miracle seems to be scoffed at and dismissed quickly, “Others note that God could have miraculously thrown in a Y chromosome if God felt like it! Who are we to place limits on the divine one? In the end, we are always making assumptions and drawing conclusions based on a religious text, not a proper historical or scientific document” (Paige, 2019:13). Paige is happy to cite references to Scripture when she believes it supports her case, as with Matthew 19:12, but is quick to dismiss Scripture as not a reliable historic document where it does not. While we would go further than Sabia-Tanis, we agree when he concludes on this speculation, “I did not find it compelling as an argument, largely because there is no way for us ever to know the truth about this and the chances of this being the case are extremely, astronomically remote.” (2018:139).

Our agreement, however, only extends to the denial of the assertion. We turn to Scripture itself for an accurate and reliable account of the virgin birth. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁸ Rather than a process of parthenogenesis, the Scripture clearly states that the virgin birth was accomplished through the Holy Spirit, which is a miraculous conception. Luke 1:35 elaborates, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy – the Son of God.” The person of Christ contains both a human and divine nature through the power of the Holy Spirit, making Him the Son of God and God the Son. Grudem points out that the significance of Jesus being born of Mary is seen in the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the Messiah would be born of a woman and destroy the serpent. This also demonstrates that, “our salvation only comes about through the supernatural work of God, and that was evident at the beginning of Jesus’ life when God ‘sent forth His Son, born under the law to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons’ Gal 4:4-5” (Grudem, 2020:664).

Grudem gives two other necessities of the miraculous nature of the virgin birth. “secondly, the virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person.” (2020: 664) Parthenogenesis would not have achieved this, and Christ would have been merely human. “Third, the virgin birth also makes possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin” (Grudem, 2020:664). This third consequence and necessity of the miraculous conception of Christ mean that Jesus could represent us in procuring righteousness on our behalf while Himself being sinless in nature and deed and a perfect sacrifice in His death for our Sin.⁸⁹ These essential salvific consequences of the scriptural account of the virgin birth negate any other non-miraculous theory or speculation used to support transgender theology. And with it, any notion that Jesus Himself was transgender. Grudem concludes, “It has been common, at least in previous generations, for those who do not accept the complete truthfulness of Scripture to deny the doctrine of the (miraculous) virgin birth of Christ. But if our beliefs are to be governed by the statements of Scripture, then we will certainly not deny this teaching” (2020:666).

⁸⁸ Matthew 1:18

⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

Next, we will appraise and consider transgender claims about Christ living in a way that validates the transgender experience. Sabia-Tanis cites Goss, “Jesus the Christ is a liminal figure, and queer postmodern representational strategies reclaim the sexuality of Jesus/Christ and play with fluid gender constructs intersected with diverse sexual attractions. The mixing and matching of signifiers of gender difference and sexual difference in representational strategies of the Christ provide alternative ways of envisioning the Christ as having liberating significance for the queer community. Our Queer exploration cuts the Christ from the moorings of dominant, heterosexist and patriarchal theologies and re-articulating the Christ within diverse sexualities and diverse theologies that affirm sexual and gender alterities. The Queer Christ is impelled by dogmatic constructions that refuse to recognise that all women, gender-variant folks, and sexual minorities image the Christ.” Sabia-Tanis concludes, “Just as we need to free ourselves from our rigid gender constructs, so too do we need to free Christ from our limited and limiting understanding of Christ” (2018:141).

At first sight, this is a difficult citation to unpick in terms of any substantive argumentation as it seems to begin with its conclusion. This, of course, is in line with the approach that is being taken in the formulation of theology in using “Queer postmodern representational strategies of Jesus/Christ” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:141). We are alerted immediately that the scientific principles of hermeneutics that reveal a text’s intended meaning has been replaced by strategies that provide the desired conclusion. ‘Queer’ locates the gender and sexual confirmation bias, ‘postmodern’ locates truth within the reader rather than the text, and “representational strategies” in the light of the first two categories seek to find images of self in the person of Christ. Sabia-Tanis does not seem to deny this but rather states, “By rearticulating Christ, we are able to see ourselves in Christ and Christ in ourselves. This approach is a critical component of a movement for spiritual liberation.” (2018:141) We must protest, however, that this is to put the proverbial cart before the horse and to make Christ in our own image. That is the heart of idolatry. Such re-articulation would be viewed from a mainstream Christian perspective as Scripturally unfounded and arguably blasphemous.

Finally, we must consider the transgender strategy of using Queer language for Jesus when discussing his counter-cultural behaviour. This seems to clearly import and suggest sexual and gender variation that accords with transgenderism to Christ’s life

and character. Sabia-Tanis Writes, “Jesus was undeniably Queer within His own life, death and ministry – queer in that he differed from that which was expected and sanctioned by his society and the religious leaders of his day... We see how queerly He interacted with religious authorities and ordinary people in ways that shocked, challenged and transformed them.” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:141) If Sabia-Tanis had used the language of cultural challenge and transformation or counter-cultural, we would have no difficulty with this statement. However, to use the term “Queer,” laden as it is with homosexual and transgender overtones, is disingenuous. Christ certainly did elevate the status of women in a way that contravened the norms of the day, and He certainly had no problem with not conforming with societal norms that transgressed God’s Holy character and Word. The woman at the Well,⁹⁰ the woman with the issue of blood⁹¹ and His association with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners was highly offensive to the religious elite. It was, however, completely in line with the character of God and His word. If by “Queer” all that is meant was that He was different to those around Him, then we would have no issue. This, however, is not the case.

In exploring the supposed Queer lifestyle of Jesus, Sabia-Tanis quotes Michelle Dee in asking whether Jesus would have cross-dressed if he were so inclined. “A question that often puzzled me is whether Jesus would have cross-dressed had he been transgender. (remember that this is a supposition, not a revision of history!) I believe he would have, only because Jesus’ record on upholding the letter of the Law of Moses was clearly chequered (crossdressing was prohibited by the letter of the law (Deuteronomy 22:5). However, Jesus consistently upheld the spirit of the Law.” Sabia-Tanis concludes, “This perspective is an interesting take on ‘what would Jesus do’ speculation and provides some rationale for how a cross-dresser might be able to see him/herself in relationship with Jesus” (2018:139).

In a desire to read a conclusion that affirms cross-dressing individuals, Sabia-Tanis, along with Michelle Dee, assumes that a ‘spirit of the law’ reading of Deuteronomy 22:5 would negate and contradict its clear and unambiguous meaning contained in the words of the text. Perhaps a timely reminder would be that Jesus did not come to abolish the

⁹⁰ John 4:1-45

⁹¹ Mark 5:25-34

law but to fulfil it.⁹² And that Jesus came to keep the law on our behalf as well as be cursed for our not keeping it.⁹³ Rather than denying Deuteronomy 22:5, Jesus fulfilled the law by never cross-dressing so that those who have can be forgiven and counted righteous as they repent and turn from the sin of cross-dressing. Sin is defined as transgressing the commands of God either in omission or commission. If it was to be argued that this was an Old Testament law that did not make it into the New Covenant we are reminded that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15, decries men even having hairstyles that would be confused for a woman's hairstyle. If anything, this is a tightening of the Deuteronomic command.

The important issue of note is that the desire within transgender authors to attribute queer and transgender tendencies to Jesus because of His breaking of societal norms is entirely invalid. Contrary to Sabia-Tanis' assertion, Jesus is not clearly or even unclearly on the Queer spectrum. In fact, as well as the salvific purpose of the incarnation, Jesus models for us true masculinity and maleness. Jesus is courageous, bold, and unflinching in the pursuit of His responsibilities, even in the face of severe opposition. Speaking the unvarnished truth, Jesus does not twist the revelation of God to fit a particular people group. He is at the same time empathetic, sympathetic, gentle and gracious toward those who suffer and society considers outcasts. He is patient and kind, without being effeminate. And rather than confirming people in their sinful lifestyles because of their hardships and suffering, Jesus tells them to "Sin no more."⁹⁴ When people met Jesus, it does not, as Sabia-Tanis insists, change and evolve Jesus according to those people, but rather it is the people themselves who are changed. Jesus never advocates and never Himself calls normal, natural, right, or affirms any action, speech or attitude that is contrary to Scripture and, therefore, sinful. It is, in fact, Scripture that has taught and shaped the Messiah with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Christ always did what was pleasing to the Father.⁹⁵ Jesus' mission was clear, "I have come to do the will of the one who sent me."⁹⁶ The content of what was pleasing to the Father was the revealed will of God in the Scriptures.

⁹² Matthew 5:17-20

⁹³ Galatians 3:13, Romans 8:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁹⁴ John 8:11

⁹⁵ John 8:29

⁹⁶ John 6:38

5.8 SUMMARY CONCLUSION ON THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The desire to see God's nature as transgender and to re-order relationships within the Trinity in both name and hierarchy is without biblical warrant. We have seen that plural language in Genesis 1 cannot be legitimately ascribed to gender within God. Language to do with gender is anthropomorphic, while that same language is given to inform maleness and femaleness in humanity. The disruption of hierarchal relationships within the Trinity and eternal subordination cannot be sustained in the light of the biblical evidence. The desire to see God's nature as changing based on the changeableness of creation fails through poor argumentation, even before considering the established biblical evidence. Likewise, the attempt to locate Jesus on the Queer or transgender spectrum in His virgin birth and lifestyle is entirely without biblical warrant. We have seen that transgender authors begin with their conclusions using postmodern, person centred, representational strategies that does nothing to reveal the natural meaning of Scripture. Rather it reads into scripture that which it seeks to find. The evangelical doctrine of God remains intact and soundly based on the inherent meaning within the appropriate texts of Scripture.

CHAPTER 6:

PERSONHOOD AND IDENTITY

Transgender theology locates its most fundamental motivation in the idea that a person's identity is located within their non-binary gender. To deny their gender identity is to deny their personhood and value as an individual. Sabia-Tanis writes, "The search for an authentic self is a primary feature in the journey of the transgendered" (2018:24) and, "We are our bodies, and I believe that we have a right to make choices about how we care for ourselves, shape ourselves, craft our bodies and our lives, dress ourselves, and move through the world" (2018:172). This second claim of the right to self-determination is something that we will also consider when we look at discipleship. In evaluating transgender claims regarding personhood, we must first consider the arguments concerning the meaning of being made in God's image. We will then look for biblical evidence and illumination on how Christians are to think of themselves in their core identity.

6.1 MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

We have already considered, in the doctrine of God, notions of God Himself being both male and female, transgender, intersex, or on the Queer Spectrum. None of the arguments from transgender authors are theologically convincing and can be safely rejected. This does remove large swathes of argumentation that to be transgender is best to represent God's image (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:61). Another common stipulation by transgender authors is that when Adam was first created, he was both male and female. Often referred to as "the earth creature" (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:61), Adam is only seen as male once Eve is created from Him. "From a single androgynous being come two types of being. More than one created being can come from the earth creature. The earth-creature became a woman and a man when God removed a part of it and fashioned it into a whole" (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:61).

Brownson observes that this kind of interpretation of the creation of human beings may find its origin in Plato's symposium, which portrays a similar creation of gendered beings from one being (2013:27). Brownson continues, "Yet this interpretation of the Genesis text is deeply problematic. There are no other places in Scripture that interpret the creation account in this way. Moreover, the details of the language in the text contradict

this reading” (2013:27). Brownson’s approach is entirely right in looking to the only two methods of ascertaining the correctness of the transgender view of Adam. That is in the text itself in Genesis 1, and in the wider Scriptures (analogy of Scripture). Turning to Genesis 2:23, we observe that after the creation of woman, we read, “Then the man said, this, at last, is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man.” Brownson notes, “The words ish and ishah are not generic terms; they are specifically gendered terms for man and woman” (2013:28). This is an important point. Adam is referred to as a gendered male before Eve existed, and Eve is a gendered female. This contradicts any idea that the woman was taken from a being that was both male and female in gender. Adam was not an androgynous earth creature but the first male human being. The “earth creature” thesis is only supported by an argument from silence and dismissed by the text of Scripture.

Next, we ask, what is the meaning of Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.”? Specifically, what does it mean that male and female represent the image of God? Grudem highlights three main areas. Firstly, harmonious interpersonal relationships. The relationship between Adam and Eve was to image, to some degree, the beautiful relationship between the members of the Trinity. Secondly, equality in personhood and importance. Grudem writes, “Just as the members of the Trinity are equal in their importance and in their full existence as distinct persons, so men and women have been created by God to be equal in their importance and personhood.” (2020:582). Thirdly, differences in role and authority. We have already noted this when considering the controversy over hierarchy and eternal subordination. The members of the Trinity, while being equally God and equally important, have different roles and authority. Of course, this points to a complementarian view of male/female relationships. It is fair to add that men display some aspects of God’s image more clearly than women, and women display some aspects of God’s image more clearly than men. This is a generalisation, of course. Strength and leadership might be seen more in Men. Nurture and protection might be seen more in women. Men vastly outnumber women in careers involving construction, while women vastly outnumber men in caring professions. This is not accidental and not the product of inequality. Men and women are different and not interchangeable by design. None of this is to restrict the meaning of the imago Dei in human beings. Grudem rightly points out that to be made in the image of God just

references all the ways in which we are like our creator, which is seen in a myriad of ways.

These scriptural observations also demonstrate that God created two genders, male and female. There is not a spectrum of gender within the being of God, and human beings were made as either male or female. Jesus, when teaching about marriage, asked, “have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4). This is a vital question for transgender authors. When we come to look at people who are born Eunuchs, and those who are born intersex today, we will consider that creation after the fall is not the benchmark for God’s original design and will be restored when Christ returns. Until then, creation groans with the effects of living this side of the fall.⁹⁷

6.2 IDENTITY AND VALUE

Next, we will consider the claim that a person’s gender or sexuality is who they really are. In other words, is the most important and defining attribute of our beings our gender identity? Is it true, that to not accept, recognise or validate a person’s gender claim that is contrary to their biology is to devalue them as a person? It is not insignificant to begin answering these questions by observing that it has been Christians that have been at the forefront of human rights, social action, and championing the cause of the downtrodden and marginalised in society. It is universally recognised within the Christian faith that the impetus for this, including the abolition of slavery, was based on mankind being made in God’s image.⁹⁸ Our value, dignity and most fundamental rights do not come from our geography, social standing, educational attainment, gender or sexuality but from bearing the image of God as His special creation. Whatever one thinks of capital punishment in society today, it was first instituted by God, not because of man’s injustice to man, but because man is made in God’s image.⁹⁹ In other words, there is intrinsic value and dignity in every human being having been made in God’s image, and to murder that image in someone is an affront to their creator. The Lord considers the most important part of us to be His image.

⁹⁷ Romans 8:22-23

⁹⁸ Taylor, J. (n.d.). *The Christian Roots of Human Rights*. [online] The Gospel Coalition. Available at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/the-christian-roots-of-human-rights/> [Accessed 10 Feb. 2023].

⁹⁹ Genesis 9:6

Not only that, the Lord delights in our bodies as designed and created by Him. We are, “fearfully and wonderfully made”.¹⁰⁰ Allberry quotes Lewis, “Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body – which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy” (2021:21). Contrary to Sabia-Tanis it is not for Human beings to reconstruct their bodies through surgery in an attempt to find ourselves, but for us to hear our creator say over our bodies “very good”.¹⁰¹ Allberry rightly asserts that we are our bodies. God did not make a soul for Adam first and then look for a suitable vessel but made the body first and then breathed a soul into it (Allberry, 2021:41). Paul agrees when he says that he does not want to be unclothed (a soul without a body) but rather further clothed with a resurrection body.¹⁰² It is impossible to be in the wrong body, as we are our bodies, designed and made by God. This is a profound starting point as we consider identity and personhood. However, Christians have even more in their arsenal when it comes to their sense of identity, and it is fundamental to salvation and the Christian life. Christians are ‘in Christ’, united to Christ and adopted into God’s family. To this, we now turn.

Transgender authors point to Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 that there is neither male nor female for support of transgender theology. However, Paul is clearly stating something much more profound. Paul is saying that the most crucial aspect of a person is not their gender or whether they are a slave or free, but rather that they are in Christ. Paul supplies an identity for Christians that we are to live in, lean on, and hold to above anything else. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰³ Paul is not denying ontological reality. There are still people who are Greek by birth. There were still slaves and free people, just as there are male and female people. Instead, what Paul is supplying for Christians is an identity that transcends all of these categories and all others. “We are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ “In Christ” is a theological and technical term for union with Christ. This union or association with Christ began before the foundation of the world in the

¹⁰⁰ Psalm 139:14

¹⁰¹ Genesis 1:31

¹⁰² 2 Corinthians 5:2-4

¹⁰³ Galatians 3:23

¹⁰⁴ Galatians 3:28

Father's electing love.¹⁰⁵ In other words, the Lord set His love upon us and chose us to be saved even before there was a creation. This happened "In Christ." In Romans 5:19, this union with Christ meant that His earthly life, death and resurrection were counted as ours¹⁰⁶ procuring our salvation and the cause of our glorification¹⁰⁷ Double imputation is the concept that our sin was imputed to Christ and His righteousness was imputed to us (believers), because of our union with Him. This union is not just that we are in Christ but that Christ is in us.¹⁰⁸ To what extent, then, are we to find our identity "in Christ?" Paul provides the answer, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."¹⁰⁹ In Colossians 3, Paul states, "your life is hidden with Christ in God."¹¹⁰

This union with Christ then becomes the power from which we live out this identity. Romans 6, for example, gives the logic of the Christian life. We died with Christ and have been risen with Him breaking the power of sin and granting us a new life to walk in, in Him.¹¹¹ With this in mind, we have the full weight of biblical authority in rejecting the idea that the main thing about a Christian is their gender or sexuality. Conversely, we affirm that believers have been provided with an identity that transcends all other concepts of identity that the world seeks to appropriate. In fact, Christians are not of this world but waiting for a city whose builder and maker is God.¹¹² Any attempt by a Christian to find their most fundamental identity and sense of self in anything other than Christ is at least to forego any spiritual power in their lives and, at worst, to sever themselves from Christ. Just as those who seek to find their value in obeying the law sever themselves from Christ.¹¹³ The gospel provides an identity that is the only one that saves and transforms and is invested with inherent dignity and value. It is not a small error to try and find our fundamental identity in something else.

We conclude that, while the world may splinter off into identity groups, including transgender, the Christian is not free to do so. Authors who assert that denying a person's gender identity is to deny their personhood and value are gravely mistaken

¹⁰⁵ Ephesians 1:4

¹⁰⁶ See also, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Philippians 3:9

¹⁰⁷ Romans 6:5

¹⁰⁸ Colossians 1:27

¹⁰⁹ Galatians 2:20

¹¹⁰ Colossians 3:3

¹¹¹ Romans 6:1-14

¹¹² Hebrews 11:10

¹¹³ In Galatians 5:4 Paul warns of finding your righteousness/value in anything other than Christ, in context, the law.

and without biblical support. It is premature to draw out pastoral and discipleship implications; however, we note that helping Christians live in their God-given identity “in Christ” is certainly in the right direction.

CHAPTER 7: EUNUCHS AND INCLUSION

Chalke considers the Ethiopian Eunuch¹¹⁴ as a principle of “radical inclusion” (2018:14). Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibits a person with crushed testicles from worshipping with the congregation of God’s people. Therefore, according to Chalke, Philip’s inclusion of the Eunuch into the church by rite of baptism is a lesson for the church on being more inclusive of gender-diverse people. (Chalke, 2018:14) Chalke does not draw a straight line between Eunuchs and transgender people but insists the analogy of inclusion is still valid. Paige goes a step further in wanting to see Eunuchs as neither male nor female, insisting that Eunuchs were seen as Otherwise-gendered people. (2019:57). Sabia-Tanis sees the Ethiopian Eunuch as occupying some grey border zone. Referencing F Scott, Sabia-Tanis gives three ways in which this border zone is occupied. Firstly, travelling at midday was “out of synch with natural and cultural rhythms (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:77). Secondly, the Eunuch is out in the wilderness outside of the social conventions of the day. Thirdly, the Eunuch was somewhere between Jew and gentile, worshipping in Jerusalem but from Ethiopia. (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:78) Sabia-Tanis then adds a fourth border zone, quoting Spencer,

First-century Jewish commentators, such as Josephus... regarded eunuchs as unnatural ‘monstrosities’ who must be shunned on account of their gross effeminacy and generative impotence (Ant 4.290-91), and Philo, who classified eunuchs as various ‘worthless persons’ banned from the sacred assembly because they ‘debase the currency of nature and violate it by assuming the passions and outward form of licentious women” (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:78)

Sabia-Tanis concluded, “The very negativity of the commentators’ reactions strengthens the argument that eunuchs are analogous to modern transgendered persons since they were considered to have crossed gender lines... Once again, we have an affirmation in Scripture that neither the gender of the Eunuch nor his gender variance is pivotal to his inclusion or exclusion from the community of faith” (2018:78-79)

That the Ethiopian was a Eunuch and that he was included in the community of faith, having been baptised by Philip, is uncontested. That the inclusion is significant is also

¹¹⁴ Acts 8:26-40

uncontested, as Acts makes a point of showing the inclusion of different groups that would not have previously been seen as full members of God's people, even if they were God-fearing. We will consider, Eunuchs in the Bible, issues of gender variance, and Eunuchs and the gospel.

7.1 EUNUCHS IN THE BIBLE

In Genesis 37:36, Potiphar is referred to as a Eunuch (Saris in Hebrew). It is of note that Potiphar had a wife, and so was unlikely to have been castrated. Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of his guard.¹¹⁵ In the academic publication, *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, Tougher notes that the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word Saris into eunouchos in Greek, translating it more surely as Eunuch. (Tougher, 2002:107) Hamilton, however, does not see Potiphar as a Eunuch because he was married and therefore not castrated (Hamilton, 1995:458). Shortly we will see that there is a category of Eunuch that is not castrated, and therefore do not find Hamilton convincing. However, there may have been some development in the meaning of eunuch between the pre- and post-exilic periods of Israel's history (VanGemeron, 1999:290). Nevertheless, given the categories of eunuchs in Matthew 19:2, we are content with Potiphar's inclusion. In Genesis 39:2, the male pronoun, his, is used of Potiphar. Rab-Saris is used in 2 Kings 18:17 to refer to an Assyrian chief Eunuch. It is translated as Chief officer or field commander in different versions.

This term, Rab-Saris, is used as an official title for other Eunuchs in the Old Testament¹¹⁶ We see then that 'Eunuch' was a term used for an official and that it did not necessarily involve castration, at least in the earliest times. However, castration is seen in Isaiah 39:7, where Isaiah tells Hezekiah that their sons will be taken off into Babylon and become Eunuchs in the King's palace. It was common practice in Babylon to castrate male prisoners of war and put them to service.¹¹⁷ In Esther 1:10 it is likely that the Eunuchs mentioned who were in service to the Royal Harem were castrated so

¹¹⁵ Genesis 37:36

¹¹⁶ Jeremiah 39:3 and Jeremiah 39:13. See also, Christianity.com. (n.d.). *What Is a Eunuch in the Bible? Definition and Examples*. [online] Available at: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/what-is-a-eunuch-in-the-bible-definition-and-examples.html>. [Accessed 14 Feb. 2023].

¹¹⁷ Christianity.com. (n.d.). *What Is a Eunuch in the Bible? Definition and Examples*. [online] Available at: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/people/what-is-a-eunuch-in-the-bible-definition-and-examples.html>. [Accessed 14 Feb. 2023].

as to remove temptation. This also seems to have been a common practice in the ancient world.

Jesus describes three categories of Eunuchs¹¹⁸

1. “For there are Eunuchs who have been so from birth”
2. “and there are Eunuchs that have been made Eunuchs by men”
3. “and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven”

In the first case, the Eunuch born that way, would seem to be a person who was physically intersex at birth. Of course, when this happens today, decisions have to be made as to which sex is most appropriate. This is not sinful and outside of our consideration of those who wish to identify as a different gender than their apparent birth sex. The second case, eunuchs made so by men, could refer to either a eunuch who has been castrated because of his royal service or a male taken as a slave and forced to live as a eunuch in royal service but potentially not castrated. To be more definitive would be an argument from silence. The third case, those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, would seem to be a reference to chosen celibacy and singleness. No castration is implied. We return to the analogy of Scripture to establish this interpretation. Negatively, there is no command or commendation for castrating yourself in the Bible. Positively, Paul commends a single life as it enables the person to serve God in His Kingdom more fully. A parallel passage to Matthew 12:19 is 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, “I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife...”. Paul goes further, wishing that all men were single like him.¹¹⁹ R T France suggests that Jesus Himself would have been considered a Eunuch as He remained single; this may have been used as a slur against Him (1985: 283).

¹¹⁸ Matthew 19:12

¹¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:7.

7.2 GENDER VARIANCE

Can it be said that Eunuchs are neither male nor female (Paige, 2019:57) but are instead analogous to transgender people (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:79)? To begin with we note that all Eunuchs by definition begin as biological males complete with male genitalia, or in some sense intersex but in such a way as to be identified as a male Eunuch. Additionally, whenever a pronoun is used for a Eunuch in the Bible it is always a male pronoun and never female or anything else. For example, in Acts 8:26-40, a favourite passage of transgender authors, the Ethiopian Eunuch is referred to as “He”¹²⁰ a masculine relative pronoun; and Potiphar was a married man.¹²¹ What we never read of is a woman identifying as a male Eunuch. However, Paige and Sabia-Tanis want to categorise Eunuchs as the gender variant or between the sexes because of the occasions where they had their male genitals removed. As we have seen though, the Bible still refers to Eunuchs as being male, not gender variant or some kind of third gender. Removing a man’s genitals evidently does not change his gender but rather classifies him as a man without genitals. Modern biology agrees with men and women having distinct chromosomes.¹²² It is, therefore, disingenuous to try and draw parallels between biblical Eunuchs and transgender people who identify as something other than their biological sex. Chalke stipulates that creation has in-between categories, for example rivers as well as streams. What of Sea Anemones and Wrass, whose gender can change? he asks (Chalke, 2018:19). Chalke concludes, “The norm does not equate to ideal, but simply to most common” (Chalke, 2018:19). In other words, gender binary in people is the norm not the ideal. However, as we shall see in the next section, Chalke’s argument is nullified by the commands of God that forbid cross-dressing, and same-sex relationships. Man is uniquely created in the image of God and not to be compared to Wrasse fish. It is impossible to know in creation what is the effect of the fall and what is original. However, when it comes to mankind, the Scriptures are clear on the original creation.

¹²⁰ Acts 8:27

¹²¹ Genesis 39:7

¹²² Differences, I. of M. (US) C. on U. the B. of S. and G., Witzmann, T.M. and Pardue, M.-L. (2001). *Every Cell Has a Sex*. [online] www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov. National Academies Press (US). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK222291/#:~:text=Females%20Have%20Two%20X%20Chromosomes%2C%20Males%20Have%20One&text=By%20the%20nature%20of%20X> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023].

7.3 EUNUCHS AND THE GOSPEL

Before we look at the inclusion of Eunuchs in the kingdom of God through salvation, we must consider if it is sinful to be a Eunuch. It seems self-evident that being born as a Eunuch is not a sinful action but a genetic defect of some kind. Additionally, to be forcefully be made a Eunuch by an invading army is to be a victim of violence and not a sinful action. Nevertheless, in Deuteronomy 23:1, such emasculated Eunuchs were forbidden at the assembly of the Lord. In the next verse, those who had an illegitimate birth were also banned from the assembly down to the tenth generation. This would be akin to women being considered ceremonially unclean for seven days during their monthly cycles.¹²³ The ceremonial law was given to teach Israel about the need for holiness and to be clean in the presence of God. These laws were action parables that constantly reminded Israel that God was Holy and had to be approached carefully, along with animal sacrifices that taught the need for a sacrifice for sin and prepared the way for Christ.¹²⁴ Indeed, Christ came to fulfil the whole law on our behalf.¹²⁵ In this way, the Eunuch can be received into the assembly of God's people and His kingdom, as we see with the Ethiopian Eunuch. However, what of those for whom Philo speaks as "monstrous" by displaying "gross effeminacy" (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:78). This would appear to be a reference to Eunuchs (male) who cross-dress and emulate the behaviour of women. This certainly would be classed as sin in both the Old Testament and New Testament.¹²⁶ Far from representing accepted behaviour in the Bible and being normative, it is legislated against. The inclusion of Eunuchs in Acts 8 is the fulfilment of New Covenant prophecy, "For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."¹²⁷

It would be implausible and speculative to put the Ethiopian Eunuch in the category of a Eunuch dressing and acting effeminately and, therefore, sinfully. The Eunuch in question fits squarely into the category of a royal official. However, if the Ethiopian Eunuch did have a sinful effeminate lifestyle, he would still have been received into the

¹²³ Leviticus 15: 19-33

¹²⁴ Hebrews 10:1-7

¹²⁵ Matthew 5:17-20, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13

¹²⁶ Deuteronomy 22:5, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 11:3-15

¹²⁷ Isaiah 56:4-5

Kingdom of God on the condition of repentance from that lifestyle and faith. In speaking of those who were adulterers, thieves, sexually immoral and practising homosexuality, yet had been washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul states, in relation to these sins, “and such were some of you.”¹²⁸ The past tense of Paul’s statement is imperative, having stated in v9 that the unrighteous, those who practice such things, will not enter the kingdom of God. This, of course, does not denote salvation by works but rather the act of turning to God for salvation, which means turning from the sins that a person is to be forgiven for in order to embrace Christ and His salvation.

The last area to consider in this section is how transgender authors use the gospel to validate their experience rather than have the gospel shape and inform them. We have seen this with Eunuchs in the Bible and their inclusion into the kingdom of God. This same strategy is used when it comes to the resurrection of Christ. Soughers argues that sex change surgery is to kill part of yourself in order to become alive (2018:142). This is seen as some kind of participation in Christ’s resurrection (Soughers, 2018:142). This is again to look at Christ through a transgender lens and find what you bring with you to the text. Christians are indeed united to Christ in His resurrection, and this does indeed result in newness of life.¹²⁹ However, Christ was raised for our justification¹³⁰ not to validate transgender surgery. We are not raised that we may continue in sin but to put it to death.¹³¹ We must receive from the gospel that which Christ has provided; forgiveness, righteousness, new life, and ultimate resurrection. The Bible warns us about mutilating the flesh in order to find acceptance with others, ourselves, or God.¹³²

We have seen that the transgender author’s desire to see Eunuchs in the Bible as equivalent to transgender people is to make serious category errors. Additionally, using the Eunuch’s inclusion into the kingdom of God in Acts 8 as a justification for a transgender person automatically remaining so after conversion is unwarranted. Indeed, as cross-dressing and same-sex relationships are outlawed in the Bible, it potentially deprives people of the opportunity for salvation. Sin must be turned from in the process of coming to Christ. The Ethiopian Eunuch marks the fulfilment of

¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

¹²⁹ Romans 6:5

¹³⁰ Romans 4:25

¹³¹ Romans 6:12

¹³² Galatians 5:2-12

prophecy, the New Covenant, where all kinds of people are welcomed into the kingdom of God, not just national Israel and converts to Judaism. This is good news for the world and especially for the poor and marginalised. However, the idea that condoning a person's lifestyle when it is described as a sin in the Bible is not biblical love. Inclusion into God's people and kingdom is on the condition of repentance and faith. Jesus preached, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand."¹³³ The chief error in transgender theological writings is starting with the transgender experience and then projecting that experience into the gospel and, indeed, the Trinity.

Before turning to a summary conclusion, pastoral and discipleship implications, we will briefly consider the transgender view of the Biblical character Joseph.

¹³³ Matthew 4:17

CHAPTER 8: JOSEPH'S FEMININITY

Paige writes, “Joseph is one of the most explicitly genderqueer characters in the Bible” (2019:99). As Joseph represents what trans authors believe to be one of the most explicit examples of someone who is genderqueer, we will consider their case for this as a representative sample of such cases. Paige notes that Joseph is defined in the text as male; however, Paige believes that Joseph was also described as beautiful in Genesis 39:6b (Paige 2019:99). The second argument for an effeminate Joseph, used by Paige, is that his coat was a woman’s garment, calling it a “princess dress” (Paige, 2019:100). Joseph’s harsh treatment by his brothers was because, “Joseph was wearing a woman’s garment, for being too close to his effeminate father, for being a different kind of man (an unmanly man) (Paige, 2019:101). Along with the accusation of being a “tittle-tattle tell-tale” and a “drama queen”, Joseph’s femininity is assured in Paige’s view. (Paige, 2019:100-101)

Our first observation is that even if this transgender description of Joseph was biblically defensible, it is very difficult to see how it adds to an affirmation of the transgender lifestyle today. The Bible is replete with actions and behaviour that elsewhere the Scriptures themselves make clear is unacceptable. Abraham acting cowardly regarding Sarah, his wife, and lying about her identity to save his own life would be an example.¹³⁴ In God’s grace and because of His larger plan, the Lord came to the rescue of Abraham and Sarah by threatening Abimelech in a dream.¹³⁵ The Lord’s rescue and subsequent use of Abraham was not a commendation of cowardice, lying and handing your wife over for sexual mistreatment. It was a sign of God’s unmerited grace and favour despite Abraham’s sinful actions. Therefore, even if Joseph acted in all the ways that Paige claims, it would not support the transgender case in the light of the wider scriptural evidence that we have already surveyed. We will, however, briefly consider the claims made by Paige to see if even the charge of femininity is warranted.

¹³⁴ Genesis 20

¹³⁵ Genesis 20

8.1 JOSEPH'S COAT AND BEAUTY

Paige writes, “Physically, Joseph is described as beautiful (Genesis 39:6b), in exactly the same way as his mother Rachel (Genesis 29:17). (2019:99). In the ESV version of the Bible, Joseph is described in Genesis 39:6b as “handsome in form and appearance.” Who is correct Paige or the ESV Bible translators? The Hebrew word used in Genesis 39:6b is “*to'-ar*”¹³⁶ Paige claims that the description of Joseph is exactly the same as his mother, Rachel. However, the word used for beautiful in Genesis 29:17 is not the same; the biblical author uses “*yaw-fex*”¹³⁷ This seems to be some sleight of hand on the part of Paige to use the original language when she believes it supports the transgender case and using English translation when it does not. Additionally, *to'-ar*, is not just used of Joseph to describe his handsomeness but also of David. “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a man of war, a prudent in speech, and a man of good presence...”¹³⁸ In this text, David is described as being of “good presence” which is the same word to describe Joseph as handsome. David is never seen as being effeminate, even by transgender authors. In Judges 8:18 *to-ar* is used to describe men as resembling the son of a King, that is of good appearance. There is, therefore, nothing in the text or in the wider use of the term *to-ar* to suggest that Joseph was being described as beautiful. In fact, if the Biblical writer wanted to draw a parallel with Rachel’s beauty the same common word for beauty, *yaw-fex*, was available. Paige’s argument is invalid.

What of Joseph’s coat, which Paige describes as a woman’s garment? This is, of course, an argument from silence. However, Hamilton states, “the word describes a garment worn by a man or a woman” (Hamilton, 1995:407). And Longacre, contributing to the *Dictionary of Old Testament Pentateuch*, writes that Joseph’s coat was “a coat with sleeves, or at least a coat of the sort worn only by supervisors” (Alexander & Wells, 2003:470)¹³⁹ Genesis 37:3 states, “Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colours.”

¹³⁶ 2013. Strong’s Concordance.v1 [Software] [Date accessed: 14 Feb 2023]

¹³⁷ 2013. Strong’s Concordance.v1 [Software] [Date accessed: 14 Feb 2023]

¹³⁸ 1 Samuel 16:18

¹³⁹ Crosswalk.com. (n.d.). *Why Were Joseph’s Brothers so Jealous of Joseph’s Coat of Many Colors?* [online] Available at: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/why-were-josephs-brothers-so-jealous-of-josephs-coat-of-many-colors.html>. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2023].

Siler¹⁴⁰ notes the complicated history of Rachel conceiving miraculously and bearing Joseph and the effects on his brothers. Siler continues,

What seems simple just got complicated. Jacob's love for Joseph is the product of a history of deception, rivalry, bitterness, anger, hatred and true love. And Jacob's children watched it all play out in front of them. They saw how Jacob loved Rachel more than their mothers. They saw how Joseph was born. He was the golden child, the one Jacob would always love more because Rachel was his mother, and he was born in Jacob's old age. I'm sure they saw Jacob spoil Joseph while they were put to work.¹⁴¹

This, along with Joseph's unwise and arrogant sharing of his dreams with his family, supplies the only biblical reasons why his brothers treated him so harshly, selling him into slavery. There is no justification whatsoever in the text that Joseph's brothers despised him because he dressed like a woman and was effeminate. Paige points out that King David's daughter is also said to have a coat of many colours in 2 Samuel 13:18 (Paige, 2019:100). However, in 2 Samuel 13:18 it is described not as having many colours but as having long sleeves.¹⁴² The exact meaning of the Hebrew phrase is unclear, and Bible translators are guided by the use of the same word in the Septuagint. What is clear is that it is an overreach to claim that Joseph's robe was a ladies' garment. It can easily have meant a royal robe, as Joseph received royal treatment and prefiguring his royal status when he was to ascend to power in Egypt. What we see, once again, is authors who promote transgender theology reading into the Bible what is not there in order to support a transgender lifestyle.

¹⁴⁰ Crosswalk.com. (n.d.). *Why Were Joseph's Brothers so Jealous of Joseph's Coat of Many Colors?* [online] Available at: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/why-were-josephs-brothers-so-jealous-of-josephs-coat-of-many-colors.html>. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2023].

¹⁴¹ Crosswalk.com. (n.d.). *Why Were Joseph's Brothers so Jealous of Joseph's Coat of Many Colors?* [online] Available at: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/why-were-josephs-brothers-so-jealous-of-josephs-coat-of-many-colors.html>. [Accessed 15 Feb. 2023].

¹⁴² 2 Samuel 13:18 ESV

CHAPTER 9:

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that transgender theology is emergent within the Church and seeks to provide a theological basis for Christians to approve of and practice a transgender lifestyle. Social and cultural factors such as secularism, emotionalism, therapeutic individualism and radical feminism have all played a role in the rise and, to some degree, acceptance of transgender theology. These cultural shifts and revolutions, beginning in the nineteen fifties, have influenced even the evangelical church by encouraging Christians to be more person-centred and emotion-driven rather than being objectively biblical. The hijacking of language means that Christians are sensitive to the charge of being unloving even though the concept of love now put forward by the LGBTQ+ community is contrary to the biblical definition. And as liberal transgender theology becomes increasingly prevalent so the challenge to the evangelical church will increase.

We have evaluated transgender theology and compared it to scriptural teaching. A key observation is that the method of interpretation used by most authors supporting transgender theology is postmodern and seeks to find the meaning of the text within the reader instead of looking for authorial intent. In other words, authors promoting transgender theology begin with their experience and look to validate it in the Scriptures rather than objectively appraise and evaluate it. This does violence to the text and is eisegesis rather than exegesis. Sound principles of hermeneutics and reformation principles, like the analogy of Scripture, have found such person-centred interpretations invalid. In particular, we have considered the challenge to the doctrine of God and the desire to see a spectrum of gender within the godhead and to disrupt their hierarchy of relationships. Studies in Genesis, anthropomorphic language, and other related Scriptures have soundly refuted any such transgender notions. The assertion that Jesus is on the queer spectrum has been shown that authors supporting transgender theology import queer language where Jesus was actually just counter-cultural and thoroughly Biblical.

Attempts to show Adam (before the creation of Eve) as androgynous were evaluated and dismissed as the Scriptures themselves use masculine pronouns for Adam before Eve was created. And given that God is not on a gender spectrum, to be transgender is

not part of being made in the image of God. We will consider further the implications for identity and personhood as we consider pastoral and discipleship implications. It suffices to say that rather than finding our identity in our sexuality or gender identity, the Bible locates a Christian's identity within their union with Christ. The implications of finding our identity anywhere else can have serious consequences.

Finally, the attempt by transgender authors to legitimise the transgender experience through the observation of Eunuchs and the biblical character of Joseph has also been seen to be without warrant. The male personal pronouns used for Eunuchs alone means that they were not considered as between male and female or a third gender, in the Bible. Where some Eunuchs in antiquity may have acted femininely and cross-dressed, this is condemned in the Bible. We considered Joseph as transgender authors believe him to be one of the clearest examples of a man who was effeminate in the Bible. We saw that even if this were true it did not support the transgender case, as many people in the Bible act in ways the Lord does not approve of. However, we saw that such claims were another case of eisegesis and arguments from silence and exegetically invalid.

In conclusion, having examined transgender theology, we have found it to have no biblical support and is an issue of first importance as, from an evangelical perspective, it could have eternal implications.

In the final chapter, we shall consider pastoral and discipleship implications arising from our evaluation of transgender Theology. The goal is not to be exhaustive in tracing out such implications but rather to point forward toward the necessary direction of travel in these areas.

CHAPTER 10:

PASTORAL CARE AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

By dealing with pastoral and discipleship considerations separately, we are making the distinction between specific pastoral cases and general spiritual formation. In some ways, this is a false dichotomy, as the goal of pastoral cases and general discipleship is for the Christian to be formed and transformed into the image of Christ.¹⁴³ And this is achieved by looking to Christ in all things.¹⁴⁴ This is an important distinction that prevents a professional view of counselling or pastoral help over discipleship. They have the same goal. With this caveat, we will allow the distinction to stand, given that we are considering specifics within pastoral considerations and generalities within discipleship consideration.

Foundationally, all considerations must begin with ensuring a correct orientation towards the issues at hand. Firstly, we have seen that the definition of love used by transgender writers does not accord with the Biblical definition of love. Morgan rightly observes that increasingly, “love no longer means to will the good of another, but to affirm the ideas of another. If you do not affirm the ideas of another person’s truth, you are unloving.”¹⁴⁵ This definition of love must be rejected in favour of the biblical alternative that accords with biblical truth and sacrifice.¹⁴⁶ The biblical meaning of love is further filled out by the one another passages of the New Testament in action and then by 1 Corinthians 13 in character and disposition. The latter means that Christians are to have a kind disposition towards others, especially those who disagree with Biblical truth.¹⁴⁷

Secondly, in the past, the Church has enjoyed, at least in the West, a privileged position where it has been seen as having some moral authority and good intentions. In short, Christians have been seen as the “good guys” (McAlpine, 2021:10). However, our cultural context has changed, as we have already seen. Christians are now firmly seen in large parts of society as “the bad guys” (McAlpine, 2021:10). This requires gracious

¹⁴³ Romans 8:29

¹⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 12:1-3

¹⁴⁵ Institute of Christian Research (2019). *If I Feel It, It’s True: Responding to the Rise of Emotionalism*. [online] Christian Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.equip.org/articles/if-i-feel-it-its-true-combating-the-rise-of-emotionalism/> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2023].

¹⁴⁶ John 15:13, Ephesians 4:15

¹⁴⁷ Romans 12:21

courage on the part of the Church. It is taken for granted that Christians will be misunderstood and maligned because a servant is not greater than his master.¹⁴⁸ Of course, any kind of victim mentality or a combative or belligerent attitude is entirely out of place for a Christian. A servant of the Lord must be gentle and kind to all and not argumentative.¹⁴⁹ However, this is to be a robust gentleness that does not shrink back from being truthful for the sake of others.

Thirdly, authors promoting transgender theology are at pains to show that a transgender lifestyle is not the product of sin but is part of God's good creation. We have already seen that this is not the case. Being transgender is not the same as people having different eye colours (Chalke, 2018:19). In fact, only a thorough understanding of sin can make sense of the human condition. The Reformed doctrine of total depravity does not mean that human beings are as depraved as they could be it is to say that every single aspect of our embodied lives is affected and touched by sin. The heart, which is the inner person or seat of our mind, will and emotions is deceitful above all things.¹⁵⁰ Human beings are born both sinful and guilty before God.¹⁵¹ The extent and power of sin is such that people are described, before conversion as dead in sin, and completely unable to come to Christ being a slave to sin.¹⁵² Naturally, our minds are dark and debased; we cannot think straight in terms of the ways of God.¹⁵³ Sin blinds our eyes and hardens our hearts.¹⁵⁴ This effect of sin is universal, Ecclesiastes 7:20 states, "Surely there is not a righteous person on earth who does good and never sins." The effect of sin is so pervasive that even Christians dare not lean on their own understanding but trust in the Lord and what He says in all things, with all their hearts.¹⁵⁵ With this in mind, Christians must acknowledge complete dependency on the Lord for both knowing the truth and being changed by it.

Fourthly, the gospel is the only way that we are saved. This salvation is from both the wrath to come when all human beings stand before God on the day of judgement, and we are saved from ourselves and our own sinfulness in this life. Having seen the power

¹⁴⁸ John 15:20

¹⁴⁹ 2 Timothy 2:24

¹⁵⁰ Jeremiah 17:9

¹⁵¹ Psalm 51:5, Romans 12:12-21

¹⁵² Ephesians 2:10, John 6:65, John 8:34

¹⁵³ Ephesians 4:18, Romans 1:28

¹⁵⁴ Hebrews 3:15,

¹⁵⁵ Proverbs 3:5-7

and extent of sin, we see the first act of the gospel in the Christian experience is to look back and see that the Lord has “shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵⁶ This is described by Jesus as being born again or born of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁷ At this point, the sinner is justified, having all their sins forgiven and counted righteous because of the salvific work of Christ.¹⁵⁸ The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit means that the Christian has a renewed nature, referred to by Paul as circumcision of the heart.¹⁵⁹ This circumcision of the heart is the promise of the New Covenant so that Christians would vitally and spiritually know the Lord and will desire to obey the Lord, having His law written on their hearts.¹⁶⁰ This means that Christians have a new indwelling power that they did not previously have, enabling them to put sin to death by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶¹ And positively being transformed to be more like Christ, as they use the means of grace to transform their minds and behold Christ. In contrast to having a right to self-determination (Sabia-Tanis, 2018:172) this involves dying to self and living for Christ.¹⁶² It is by living this crucified life by the power of the Spirit that Christians become whole as human beings and experience love, peace and joy. This is antithetical to transgender authors, as we have seen.¹⁶³ Additionally, the Christians’ sense of acceptance and love comes from being adopted by God and the Holy Spirit, making that adoption a felt experience.¹⁶⁴ Any other approach to the Christian life that seeks wholeness and fulfilment apart from Christ ends in losing our lives in a vain attempt to save them, as warned by Christ.¹⁶⁵

Having orientated ourselves to the biblical goals, priorities and methods of spiritual formation, we now turn to pastoral consideration.

10.1 PASTORAL CONSIDERATION

There are four pastoral categories that we can identify that need to be considered. These categories are not water-tight and will usually overlap each other.

¹⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:6

¹⁵⁷ John 3:3-5

¹⁵⁸ Romans 5:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 2:13

¹⁵⁹ Colossians 2:11

¹⁶⁰ Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:24-28

¹⁶¹ Romans 8:13

¹⁶² Colossians 2:20

¹⁶³ Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁶⁴ Romans 8:16, Romans 5:5

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 16:25

10.2 GENDER DYSPHORIA

Vaughan Roberts, a Christian who is same-sex attracted, writes of transgender people, “Most of them don’t have a strong political agenda or any desire to fight in a ‘culture war’; they are simply trying to cope with feelings that may well cause them great distress. Too often they are being damaged in the crossfire of what can become a very heated debate” (2016:14). Roberts makes the point that, of the children that experience some form of gender confusion, most find this disappears completely during adolescence. Roberts continues, “But for others, there is a prolonged sense of disharmony within them that causes great distress. Professionals call this ‘gender dysphoria.’ These individuals frequently speak about feeling they are trapped in the wrong body, and will often testify that these thoughts go back as far as early childhood, maybe the age of 5 or 6. Many also describe a sense of profound isolation in the following years and of difficulty sharing how they feel with others because of fear they will be misunderstood or rejected” (Roberts, 2016:16-17). Roberts then notes that gender dysphoria is said to be experienced by approximately one in ten thousand males and one in twenty thousand females. For those not serious enough to be diagnosed, Roberts states, it is closer to one in two hundred and fifteen and one in three hundred, respectively.

The Church must note, then, that when faced with someone struggling with gender identity, there is a good chance that this person is seriously suffering. In the midst of culture wars and activism, it can be too easy to take a dispassionate disposition towards those struggling with their gender identity. This then becomes a safe pastoral starting point when faced with a transgender individual. Great care and compassion are called for. The alternative, unhelpful response is to shy away from interacting and caring for this individual because of any felt lack of experience in this area. Suffering comes with many faces, but it is still suffering. The pastoral heart should be that of Jesus, who, when addressing a harassed crowd, said, “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁶⁶ If the person is a non-Christian, then the Church will do well to remember that it is not called to judge the world.¹⁶⁷ While the person may be cross-dressing, this is not the unforgivable sin, and it is just more visible than other

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 11:28-30

¹⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 5:12

sins like pride and self-righteousness. As it would, most of the time, not be appropriate to call a non-Christian out on their pride when you first meet them after a church service; the same would apply to a transgender person. Answering questions truthfully and gracefully is, of course, expected. Roberts suggests that a good starting point is understanding what they are going through (2016:20) and ensuring the person feels accepted and loved. Belonging usually precedes believing. This takes a graceful, gospel-centred church environment that is willing to love people as they are and be part of the salvation process. It is only God who can save, but the Church is to be His hands of love and His heart of warmth. At some point, either the person in question will raise the issue, or sufficient trust will be established for a Christian to raise it as part of the person's spiritual journey. The aim is for the transgender person to encounter Christ for themselves and for Him to change them. Of course, this change does not necessarily mean that they will no longer live with gender dysphoria. It does mean experiencing Christ working in their lives in a way that does bring comfort even in the midst of pain and difficulty.

Having said this, there cannot be a cookie-cutter approach to any pastoral situation. There may be occasions and circumstances that a different and more immediate process is needed, but we are considering generalities. Empathy, grace and love are to be the main hallmarks of the gathered community of faith. This is a challenge for the Church to live deeply in the gospel and see that, even after conversion, the Church is a glorious mess.

10.3 TRANS-TRENDING

Trans-Trending was a google search phrase that ended up becoming a movement of parents concerned about the number of children identifying as transgender from an early age and adolescence.¹⁶⁸ The movement was also concerned about legislation being made and the messaging in schools that normalised an ideology without any professional diagnosis of gender dysphoria. This entailed young boys wearing skirts to school and teenagers being put on hormone blockers and a pathway to life-altering surgery. The name, Trans-trending, is also suggestive of young people adopting a different birth sex for other reasons than gender dysphoria. For young children, this

¹⁶⁸ Transgender Trend. (n.d.). *About Us*. [online] Available at: https://www.transgendertrend.com/about_us/. [Accessed 05 Apr. 2023].

may have more to do with the parents being convinced by gender ideology and misreading words and actions by their children. A boy wanting to play with dolls is not a sign of gender dysphoria. A girl saying, they want to be a boy could be because she thinks her brother or boys get special treatment. Shrier comments on online videos of young girls making pacts about changing their gender identity,

“Transgender success stories are everywhere and celebrated. They march under the banner of civil rights... But the phenomena sweeping teenage girls is different. It originates not in traditional gender dysphoria but in videos found on the internet. It represents mimicry inspired by gurus, a pledge taken with girlfriends – hands and breath held, eyes squeezed shut. For these girls, trans identification offers freedom from anxiety’s relentless pursuit; it satisfies the deepest need for acceptance, the thrill of transgression, the seductive lilt of belonging” (Shrier, 2021:xxix-xxx).

Shier calls this phenomenon “social contagion.” (2021:xxx) Additionally, part of the normal adolescent experience is to not feel comfortable in your own skin and that you are different and do not fit in. These feelings all too easily result in a transgender label when they are a normal part of development.

The trend of self-identifying without any medical diagnosis is a dangerous one. We have already noted that the London transgender clinics that dealt with hormone therapy and reassignment surgery have closed amidst a barrage of lawsuits by those whose lives have been ruined. What, then, are the pastoral implications for the Church? The Church does have a duty of care for the children within it. This requires that children be taught in Sunday schools and youth clubs about gender and their value coming from being God’s special creation. Children need to be taught that we are our bodies, and our minds sometimes have problems because of the fall. This leads to the gospel and finding our identity in Christ. Additionally, if the child of a parent identifies as transgender, then it would be appropriate to question this identification with the parent. As Shrier states, “parents are not the best judge of a child being transgender” (2021:xxx). Questions such as,

- What has made you think they are transgender?
- Do you know the signs of the medical condition, gender dysphoria?

- It is normal and common for children to go through phases as they grow up, is this a phase?
- Have you read anything that informs you of the damage that can be done to your child? Such as *“Irreversible Damage”* by Abigail Shrier
- Can we meet up and look at the Bible together to see what God says about gender?

Parents should also be encouraged to talk to their children’s schools about curriculum and concerns about transgender ideology being enforced in schools when it runs contrary to their Christian beliefs. Religion is a protected human right. Tran-Trending has many resources on its website.¹⁶⁹

10.4 IDEOLOGUES AND ACTIVISTS

It will likely be uncommon for transgender activists to attend church regularly, though this should be prayed for. However, when such people do attend church, our observations about Gender Dysphoria apply. They, too, may also be experiencing suffering and pain over an incongruence between body and mind and need empathy, love and acceptance. It is unlikely that any arguments without relationships will be successful. Of course, truth in love is always appropriate, and the Church is not to conceal the truth but to be timely when talking to an individual who is in much pain.

The church will also have been affected by the influence of transgender ideology and activism coming through social media, television and non-Christian friends. This influence needs to be counteracted in pastoral visitation when appropriate, as well as in the main teaching times of the Church and small groups.

¹⁶⁹ Transgender Trend. (n.d.). *Schools Resources*. [online] Available at: <https://www.transgendertrend.com/schools-resources/> [Accessed 09 Apr. 2023].

CHAPTER 11:

DISCIPLESHIP CONSIDERATION

In considering discipleship, we are considering how Christians are formed into the image of Christ. We have seen that the effect of secularism, emotionalism, therapeutic individualism and radical feminism is to undermine biblical authority in the Christians' life and to replace it with the Christian's own feelings and thought. These feelings and thoughts are shaped, to varying degrees, by culture. We have seen, as Trueman stated, that there has also been a loss of doctrine, that is, doctrinal teaching and preaching and a valuing of doctrine. Many of the current discipleship methods employed do not seem to have had a widespread effect on biblical convictions. We have seen that the Church can fall into the danger of meeting the expectations of culture by pandering to therapeutic individualism. The problem with therapeutic, individualistic approaches to spiritual formation is it negates living in union with Christ, which is the biblical method for growth and change. It does not happen when Christians focus on themselves, their thoughts and feelings as being the guide to what is necessary. Three main implications for discipleship arise from our research.

11.1 BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

Christians need to regain deep and firm convictions regarding the Bible as God's infallible, inerrant revelation. This needs to take place in example as well as in teaching. The public reading of the Scriptures can be given more eminence and emphasis in Sunday services. In Ezra 4, Ezra reads the law to the people, and they all stand to hear it being read. In the passage, there is a sense of importance and reverence that needs to be recovered. Standing for the reading of God's word on a Sunday is one possible way of elevating the Scriptures in the minds and hearts of the Church. Secondly, regularly explaining from the Bible why the Church does what it does, anchors the activities of the Church in the will of God and demonstrates the importance of doing so. Thirdly, teaching what the Bible is and how it fits into the Christian life, as well as encouraging personal and family devotions based on the Scriptures, helps people make the Bible central to life. This includes teaching and practising together believing the promises of God when faced with trials and difficulties. This ensures that convictions about the Bible are not theoretical but lived out. The Church needs to return to a reformational priority in terms of the Scriptures.

11.2 GOSPEL CENTRED

A thorough understanding and belief in the Christian's sinfulness and, at the same time, the grace and forgiveness of Jesus are how Christians grow. How we start the Christian life is how we continue.¹⁷⁰ Luther's Latin phrase, *simul justus et peccator*, is instructive. Luther was saying that Christians are simultaneously a sinner and justified. In this balance, without condemnation, Christians learn to mistrust their thoughts and feelings and trust Christ. Discipleship must be rooted in union with Christ, not just for salvation but identity, value, love and sanctification. After biblical authority, discipleship based on union with Christ is paramount. In an age of identity groups, being "in Christ" is all the Christian needs. "You are complete in Christ."¹⁷¹ Christians do not need to find their identity or value in their gender and indeed must not.

11.3 GOD AND SUFFERING

We have seen that transgender theology warps the doctrine of God and therefore worship. Therapeutic individualism has also undermined the doctrine of God by tempting churches to be people-centred rather than God-centred. This has the effect of making God a magic genie who exists to make Christians happy. This undermines Christians when they suffer, including the suffering of gender dysphoria. Reversing this perverse order and being God-centred results in Christians delighting in God instead of seeking satisfaction in the wrong places. It also enables the sufferer to enter into the afflictions of Christ. Paul states. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body the Church."¹⁷² Paul is not saying that there was anything lacking in Christ's afflictions in order to save forever those who come to Him.¹⁷³ Rather, it is that Christ has returned to heaven and is not bodily present to suffer in the ways that are needed to build up those in the Church. Jesus cannot go without in order to supply another Christian's needs. He cannot physically sit at someone's bedside while they die of cancer. Similarly, a transgender person can bear the pain they feel for the sake of Christ, entering into His sufferings as others see their witness. Christians will be encouraged to bear their suffering with faith, Christ will be praised, and unbelievers will see the power of Christ.

¹⁷⁰ Colossians 2:6-7

¹⁷¹ Colossians 2:10

¹⁷² Colossians 1:24

¹⁷³ Hebrews 7:25

This necessitates teaching that brings Christians out of themselves and beholds God in the face of Jesus Christ. The result is that of the transgender person finding their lives in the sense of which Jesus speaks and promises.¹⁷⁴ And in knowing the comfort of God¹⁷⁵ at least to some degree, the pain lessening through finding true identity in Christ. Teaching warmly about the attributes of God, His nature and character, and the person of Christ ensures that the Holy Spirit will reveal more of God to the open-hearted believer.¹⁷⁶ This is not to treat lightly the suffering of those who struggle with gender dysphoria. Instead, it is to take the promises of God seriously.

11.4 CREATION

It is necessary to restore a biblical view of creation, both in its original glory and intent and in its fallenness, pointing forward to when creation will be restored. A focus on creation takes a wide cosmological view of the gospel and locates Christians in God's grand plan. This focus brings a sense of purpose and destiny as well as realism about the present world. Additionally, a focus on the creation of human beings in God's image draws a straight line amongst all the gender confusion and engenders love, respect and service towards others.

11.5 STRUCTURES AND PROCESS

The above focal points are not meant to be exhaustive but areas of weakness that can have maximal effects if focused on. Finally, it is right to give some consideration to the structure of discipleship. This is, of course, secondary to content. If the content above replaces content shaped by therapeutic individualism, then many existing structures, like small groups and courses, can be maintained. However, Packer has suggested that the weakness in the church is, at least partially, due to leaving the tried and tested methods of the past (2013:38). In particular, Packer recommends the church go back to using a catechism¹⁷⁷ for its spiritual formation. The catechism would be committed to memory and recited on pastoral visits, when the whole church gathered, and in family devotions. The catechism came with Scripture references that would be used to study

¹⁷⁴ Matthew 16:25

¹⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

¹⁷⁶ John 16:13, Ephesians 1:17-18

¹⁷⁷ A catechism is a series of questions and answers on biblical topics and was used to great effect in the Puritan era.

the various topics. Perhaps learning by memorisation and rote was a crucial part of not just knowing scriptural truth but being shaped and transformed by it. There are historical catechisms that can be used, like the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, catechisms were made in the context of their times in suitable language and addressing issues of the day. With this in mind, the following appendices is a suggested shorter catechism, with a link to the full version.

In the final conclusion, we have considered the plausibility structures that have enabled the rise of transgender theology. We then evaluated transgender theology and found that it used person-centred, postmodern eisegesis in its formulations. Using established hermeneutics and exegesis of the relevant texts, we found the emergent theology to be invalid. We, therefore, considered pastoral and discipleship implications for countering transgender theology within the Church.

APPENDIX:

SHORTER CATECHISM

What follows is a suggested shorter catechism that could be used when a person first becomes a Christian or for younger people to memorise. The suggested full catechism has 52 questions and answers.¹⁷⁸

Question 1: Who is God?.

There is one God who is sovereign, uncreated, and glorious; He is expressed in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are equal and eternal.

(Deuteronomy 6v4-8, 1 Chronicles 29v11-12, 2 Corinthians 3v12-18, John 1v1, Titus 2v11-14, Genesis 1v2, Matthew 3v16-17, 2 Corinthians 3v14)

Question 2: What is God like?

God is love, goodness, holiness, justice, mercy and beauty. Everything good, perfect and praiseworthy are reflections of His character.

(1 Peter 1v14-19, Isaiah 57v15, Psalm 89v11-17, Hebrews 10v28-31, 1 John 1v9, Lamentations 3v22-23, Psalm 25v6-9, 1 Peter 1v3, 1 John 1v5-10, Psalm 27v4-6)

Question 3: How do we generally know about God?

We know about God from what He has made, His actions in history, and our conscience revealing His moral nature so that all are without excuse.

(Romans 1v18-20, Psalm 19v1-14, Acts 14v8-18, Romans 2v12-16, Acts 17v16-31, Psalm 14v1-4)

Question 4: How do we specifically know about God?

The Bible, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, reveals Jesus who is the exact image of God.

(Colossians 1v15-20, Hebrews 1, John 14v1-17, Ephesians 1v15-23, 1 Corinthians 2v11-13, 1 John 2v20, Mark 4v35-41, Mark 9v2-8, John 9v24-4, John 10v11-18)

¹⁷⁸ www.newlifeloughborough.com. (2021). *Q & A (Catechism) - New Life Community Church*. [online] Available at: <https://www.newlifeloughborough.com/q-a-catechism/> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2023].

Question 5: What is the Bible?

The Bible is God's inerrant self-revelation, written by people, superintended by the Holy Spirit. To obey the Bible is to obey God.

(Deuteronomy 17v18-20, Jeremiah 30v1-7, Proverbs 30v1-6, 2 Timothy 3v10-17, John 14v24-31, 2 Peter 1v16-21)

Question 6: What is the Bible for?

The Bible is our final authority, showing the only way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and is sufficient for all things in life and godliness.

(Romans 10v13-17, John 14v1-11, 2 Timothy 3v16-17, Deuteronomy 29v29, Matthew 4v1-11, John 14v15, 2 Peter 1)

Question 7: What did God make?

Out of nothing, God created and sustains all things visible and invisible, including mankind.

(Genesis 1v1-13, Genesis 1v14-25, Genesis 1v26-31, John 1v1-4, Colossians 1v15-20, Psalm 139v1-16)

Question 8: Are all people created equal?

All people are created equal regardless of race or sex, having great value being made in the image of God.

(Genesis 1v26-31, Romans 2v1-11, Luke 10v25-37, Leviticus 19v3-4, Galatians 3v23-29, 1 Timothy 2v1-7)

Question 9: Do men and women complement each other?

Men and women have differing but complementary roles, not affecting their value but preserving the distinctions of male and female that God created.

(1 Corinthians 11v1-3, Titus 2, 1 Timothy 2v8-15, 1 Peter 3v1-7, Ephesians 5v15-21)

Question 10: What is marriage in the sight of God?

Marriage is a spiritual union between a man and a woman for companionship and raising children while picturing Christ and His Church.

Question 11: What is sin?

Issuing from a corrupt nature, sin is loving and trusting created things over the creator, resulting in the rebellious failure to obey God's commands.

(Romans 7v7-25, Romans 1v21-25, 1 John 3v4-10, Psalm 51, 1 John 5v8-10, Romans 3v21-26)

Question 12: Are people slaves of sin?

All people are slaves to their sinful desires, having the freedom to choose Christ but not the desire to do so without the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

(John 8v31-38, Romans 3v5-20, John 6v60-71, Romans 8v5-11, 1 Corinthians 2v14-16, Acts 16v11-15)

Question 13: What is the punishment for sin?

All who sin are cut off from God, live under His judgment, die physically, and suffer eternal punishment according to the light they have received.

(Romans 7v7-25, Romans 1v21-25, 1 John 3v4-10, Psalm 51, 1 John 5v8-10, Romans 3v21-26)

Question 14: What is our only hope in life and death?

Our only hope is trusting in the saving work of Jesus Christ, apart from good works.

(Isaiah 59v1-8, Romans 1v18, Romans 5v12-21, Ezekiel 18v20, John 3v16-21, Galatians 6v7-8, Revelation 20v11-15)

Question 15: What was achieved by Christ's life?

Whilst revealing the Father, Christ lived a perfect sinless life on behalf of those He would save, replacing their sin with His righteousness.

(John 14v1-11, Matthew 11v25-30, Hebrews 4v11-16, 1 Corinthians 1v26-31, Romans 5v18-21, 2 Corinthians 5v16-21)

Question 16: What was achieved by Christ's death?

Christ is the propitiation for our sins, having suffered the wrath that we deserve so as to be both just and merciful, while reconciling creation to Himself.

(Isaiah 53v1-6, 1 Peter 2v18-25, Colossians 1v15-22, Romans 1v18-26, Hebrews 2v1-18)

Question 17: What was achieved by Christ's resurrection?

Christ rose victorious over sin, death, and Satan, assuring our forgiveness and causing us to be born again as the first fruits of the new creation, the renewal of all things.

(1 Corinthians 15v1-11, Romans 4v13-25, 1 Peter 1v3-9, 2 Corinthians 5v17, Ephesians 1v15-23, 1 Corinthians 15v12-28)

Question 18: What is union with Christ?

God spiritually joins to Christ those who trust in Him so as to see them as having fully participated in Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

(John 6v51-58, Galatians 2v19-21, Romans 6v1-11, Ephesians 2v1-10, Ephesians 4v1-10, John 4v13-19)

Question 18: What is justification?

In Justification, God irreversibly declares righteous those who trust in Christ, based not on their works but on the merits of His life and death.

(Romans 4v1-8, Romans 5v1-11, Romans 8v31-39, Psalm 103v1-14, Galatians 2v15-21)

Question 19: What is regeneration?

Flowing from our union with Christ, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, giving new desires, new life, and connecting our souls to God.

(John 3v1-8, John 6v60-65, Ephesians 2v1-10, Jeremiah 31v31-34, 1 Peter 1v3-9, Ezekiel 36v25-28, Titus 3v5)

Question 20: What is adoption?

We are no longer slaves but members of God's family, delighted in by the Father, and rejoicing in Him by the Holy Spirit, anticipating our full inheritance.

(Galatians 4v1-7, John 1v1-12, Romans 8v12-19, Zephaniah 3v14-17, Romans 8v18-30)

Question 21: What is sanctification?

Christians are not their own but have been bought with a price and are set apart for worship and service, as holy to the Lord and saints of the Most-High God.

(1 Corinthians 1v26-31, Hebrews 10v1-18, 1 Corinthians 6v12-20, Isaiah 6, Galatians 1v11-24)

Question 22: What else is sanctification?

Sanctification is also the process of being separated from sin so that Christ's righteousness becomes our experience and we progressively bear His likeness.

(Romans 8v26-29, Romans 12v1-2, 1 Corinthians 6v9-20, Romans 8v12-17, Galatians 5v16-26, 1 Thessalonians 4v1-7)

Question 23: Does God preserve His people?

God ensures that all who start in faith will finish in faith through the promises of the New Covenant so that not one of His sheep is lost.

(John 17v13-26, Luke 22v31-34, John 6v35-40, 1 Peter 1v3-9, Hebrews 3v1-6, Colossians 1v21-23, 1 John 2v19, Romans Bv31-39, Phil 1v12-18)

Question 23: What is Christian maturity?

Maturity prizes Christ above all, and through beholding Him fulfils the law of love in both motive and action, displaying the fruit of the Holy Spirit in sacrificial service towards others for the glory of God.

(Matthew 13v44-46, Luke 14v26, Matthew 6v24, 2 Corinthians 3v7-18, Romans 13v8-14, John 13v34, Galatians 5v16-25, Romans 12)

Question 25: Will Christ return?

After the falling away, and the man of sin is revealed, Christ will return with the saints who have died to rescue His people and destroy the anti-Christ with the breath of His mouth.

(2 Thessalonians 2v1-12, Matthew 24v3-13, 1 Thessalonians 5v1-11, Matthew 24v15-31, 1 Thessalonians 4v13-18, & 3v11-13)

Question 26: What is the day of judgment?

Justice will prevail as all people are judged for their sin; the righteous will inherit the kingdom and the rebellious the lake of fire.

(Matthew 13v47-50, Matthew 25v31-46, Revelation 20v7-15, Psalm 2, Romans 14v10-12, 2 Corinthians 5v10)

Question 27: What happens after judgment?

With resurrection bodies, believers will dwell in the new heavens and new earth receiving gracious rewards for their works of faith.

(John 5v19-29, 1 Corinthians 15v12-28, 35-49, 50-58, Revelation 21v1-8, Matthew 6v16-24, 1 Corinthians 3v10-23)

CHAPTER 12:

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