



THE GOSPEL AND GENDER

*What about the T,Q,I? Gender, Transgender,
Queer Theory, Intersex, and the Gospel*

Produced by the Gospel in Society Today Committee
of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland



GIST Paper

What about the T, Q & I: Gender, Transgender, Queer Theory, Intersex, and the Gospel

Opening Acknowledgement:

When it was tabled and discussed at the 2016 General Assembly of the PCQ, many of those present were united in expressing sorrow that their attitudes and ministry approach to human gender, and especially to those who experience gender identity struggles, may have sometimes failed to acknowledge their own sin, causing undue hurt; may have failed to adequately understand such struggles; and, in doing so, may have also prevented the hope of the gospel being heard by those who, like us, are in desperate need of salvation and secure identity in Christ.

Therefore, as an Assembly, we commit ourselves to repentance for any sinful attitudes and to attending with compassion to people who struggle with sexuality, gender and identity. We commit to this in order to carefully and faithfully share with them the vital, liberating news of salvation, secure hope and identity in Christ.

We believe that this paper is a tentative first step in this direction.

Description

The issue of gender, and how the world understands what it means to be human, is a significant and present concern in public debate both here in Australia and abroad. Transgender rights are the new flashpoint in the ongoing shift away from Biblical norms and the created order; and are in the public conversation thanks to initiatives like the Safe Schools educational material and questions about such diverse issues as school uniforms and public toilets. As Christians we are called to respond to the world in love, not from fear, confident not only that Jesus is King, but that he is the real answer to the longing of every human heart.

“This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.” — 1 John 4:17-19

This is an initial position paper from the GIST Committee responding to these social changes which is intended to form the basis for our engagement on these issues as a committee, consistent with the philosophy of ministry adopted by the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland. In sum:

Our two-fold purpose is to equip believers in PCQ congregations to:

- a) live faithfully for Jesus in a secular society and;
- b) engage in gospel-hearted apologetics that point to the great hope we have in Jesus.

Scope

Our scope is limited to the areas of ethics, public policy and cultural engagement that impact significant numbers of Queenslanders.

Approach

We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should shape all areas of life, and therefore our approach is to provide engaging, accurate and winsome material that is informed by Evangelical, Reformed, Christ-centred theology and includes both implications for believers and principles of engagement with those not yet believing.

This paper builds on the theological framework established in earlier works of the committee, specifically its papers on The Gospel in Sexuality and The Gospel in Humanity. These papers were adopted by previous Assemblies and we have assumed their conclusions in this paper in order to present a suite of resources for helping Christians to think through these complex issues in a unified frame.

Position Summary

1. God created humanity as male and female. This is his good design for biological sex and gender.
2. The fall brings curse and frustration to our experience of humanity including struggle, distress and sinful distortion in our experiences of gender and sexuality. Intersex and Transgender individuals are experiencing a particular manifestation of the effect of the fall on the image of God in us.
3. Individuals experiencing these conditions, like all of us, are still made in God's image and so should be accorded the same dignity and love as any other human.
4. This tension between God's created order, and the total depravity of humanity, which extends to our biology, means that there are complexities to considering how we care for and minister to transgender and intersex people in the gospel – it is more than a matter of asserting the binary nature of biological sex and gender.

5. Our rapidly changing secular society appears to be departing rapidly from traditional, and Biblical, norms of gender and sexuality to normalise a 'fallen' rather than 'created' pattern for humanity, biological sex, and gender.
6. These changes are often driven by members of the LGBTQIA community, and their advocates, according to different agendas, and in the pursuit of different ends.
7. There is a particular stream of the LGBTQIA community who have adopted a form of Marxism to pursue a 'Gender Queer' agenda intent on eradicating 'male' and 'female' as categories. This position is vigorously contested within the LGBTQIA community, especially by some transgender advocates. One recent manifestation of this idolatrous ideology is the Safe Schools program; which has good intentions in terms of mental health outcomes and safety for a marginalised and at risk section of the community, but is underpinned by this agenda. The church must find better ways to care for transgender and intersex people while repudiating this agenda.
8. Each subset of this diverse community has different, sometimes competing, desires and goals, but a shared interest in safety, being accepted and affirmed by society. The LGBTQIA community are at greater risk of mental illness than the wider community.
9. All humans were made to bear God's image and to find our identity in relation to Him. As a result of the Fall, we all naturally seek this identity in created things (including biological sex, gender, and sexuality) rather than in God, as we see him in Jesus.
10. It is only in Jesus that we find forgiveness for our idolatry and rebellion, and are reconciled to God. Moreover, the restoration of our humanity in Jesus involves a new identity in harmony with God's creation design for us, and includes the longing for resurrected bodies and a world with no curse or frustration. This is where real hope is found for all people.
11. As those loved by God in Jesus, we seek to build churches in which people of all ages grow together in the gospel, and from which we reach out in love to the lost with the gospel. Our churches also form vital relational contexts which reinforce, enrich and model identity in Christ in contrast to the idolatrous identities of the world.
12. We must be careful, in speaking about Transgender and Intersex people, and issues in our community, not to readily conflate these conditions with the Marxist 'gender-queer' agenda, and so isolate individuals. The LGBTQIA allegiance is fragile, complex,

and based on a desire to be heard and accepted. We would do well to listen carefully to each community, and each individual, before adopting blanket and simplistic position statements that deny the complex realities for these communities. Moreover, we desire and do everything we can to see each individual come into a saving, liberating and transforming relationship with Jesus.

A Note on Pronouns

We have used the pronouns quoted individuals have chosen to use for themselves (while noting in brackets where transitions have occurred). We have done this because of our desire to hear people speak on their own terms in the first instance. However, we also recognise the powerful role of language in revealing, shaping and reinforcing our beliefs. Gospel driven love desires to help restore people to wholeness in Christ, integrating gender identity together with God-given biological sex. This desire should be reflected in the personal language (including pronouns) we carefully use as we walk beside people in gospel shaped relationships.

The Situation

Our rapidly changing society has left many people fearful, and worried that they might be alone. It has created many coalitions where people with shared interests come together for protection, or to advocate in areas of shared concern. Sometimes those in power are there because they've done the work of forming a shared platform or agenda so that a particular ideology now seems to disproportionately shape the public. We form coalitions and lobby groups as Christians, but we are not alone in fearing rapid social change and fearing what those in power might do to us according to a particular agenda or ideology. But we are not alone in this.

Many social commentators have noticed the growing number of letters, and experiences, coming under the umbrella of what was once the LGBT movement. Christians have, for some time, considered how to respond to those in this movement whose identities are derived from their sexuality – Lesbian (L), Gay (G), and Bisexual (B) individuals, but are only now beginning to grapple well, and publish thoughts, on how to engage with the reality for Transgender (T) people. This more recent response has come, in part, because the reality of Transgender people has been made public through the lives of prominent or famous transgender people like Australian Defence Force speech-writer Group Captain Cate McGregor, US television personality Caitlin Jenner, and others like prominent movie producers the Wachowski Sisters (formerly known as the Wachowski Brothers). The letters have expanded more recently to include gender-queer (Q), intersex (I), and asexual (A).

It might, at times, feel like we as Christians are the ones who are living in fear, especially when we observe how fast society is moving from what we consider 'normal' and from God's created order. We are increasingly a minority voice in our community, and will increasingly struggle to be heard and understood.

The world is also a confusing and scary place for those in minority groups, whose experiences of life are such that the vast majority of people do not understand. This is why these groups band together, so they too might be heard and understood. But this allegiance is fragile. Like most coalitions, these associations are occasionally fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions.

What these different groups share is a sense that:

- their experience of humanity (especially gender and sexuality), and so their identity falls outside social norms;
- that this creates fear, confusion, misunderstanding, danger and a lack of safety in society
- without advocacy their experience would be ignored by a majority unable to truly empathise with their experience. Affirmation – personally, societally and politically – is felt by many to be a key step in developing a solid sense of identity.

These inconsistencies and contradictions present themselves when, for example, some advocating for homosexual rights argue that sexuality is something you are born with, and essential; such that it cannot possibly be changed or questioned, while transgender advocates argue that the ‘sex’ you are born with should be able to be changed in order to accommodate your gender identity.

A particular stream of gender-queer theory, led in Australia by the Safe Schools Coalition’s Roz Ward (a transgender woman), seeks to abolish all categorisation based on gender and sexuality, such that all people are ‘queer,’ while Catherine McGregor (a transgender woman) says distinct genders – male and female – are fundamentally important to her, and are entirely the point of being transgender, that an individual finds meaning and identity when their biological sex and their gender identity are aligned so that they are ‘male’ or ‘female’.

The intersex community contains those whose gender is biologically indeterminate, or those who had a gender assigned to them at birth. Their experience is perhaps the furthest removed from others in the LGBTQIA community, and in some ways, they are the least likely to feel adequately represented by others in this ‘broad church.’

The strength of the LGBTQIA movement is that it provides a safe place, and a place of listening, understanding and affirmation for those whose experiences of sex, gender, and identity fall outside of traditional social norms. The LGBTQIA community is built on the fundamental desires to be loved, understood, accepted and safe from fear and persecution.

The church, in taking up the example and love of Jesus, should aim to become a community that connects LGBTQIA people in our community with the transforming love of Jesus, and through our love helps point to Jesus as the answer for the LGBTQIA community’s desire to be loved, understood, heard and safe. But the church must also faithfully proclaim that the effects of the Fall – sin and death – are *wired into the being of every person*, and that *Jesus is the answer to the deeper longing of our hearts* and our search for identity and joy.

This paper will suggest that:

- Real wholeness, and real identity, is not found in our gender or sexuality, but in rediscovering our created purpose and dignity, as God’s image bearers, and that we make this discovery through Jesus.
- Our union with Christ, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit, begins a process that will ultimately undo the natural frustration and sin we experience in this world, and that this process culminates in our re-creation with new, resurrected, unblemished hearts, minds and bodies in the New Creation.
- The present reality is that we live in a fallen world, frustrated by God’s curse, with minds, hearts, emotions and bodies that have been fundamentally scarred by sin (both our own sin and that of others) and death (Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 15).

Our hope for restoration is not surgery, or a coalition of people who will listen to us, but Jesus; however, our churches should be places that seek to understand and articulate this hope, this present reality, and the individual struggles and burdens of individuals in both our churches and our community.

Our churches should be known as places where people feel safe to bring their burdens and fears so that their deepest needs might be met in the God who exposes and forgives our sin, tends to our hearts, and will make all things new (Revelation 21-22).

Summary of relevant GIST framework on issues of humanity, sexuality, and gender

In the *Gospel in Humanity* and *Gospel in Sexuality* papers, adopted by previous PCQ Assemblies and published on the PCQ website, we established the following Biblical data points that will inform the approach in this paper, especially:

- God created human beings – male and female - to reflect His image
- Humanity’s task of reflecting the image of God was disastrously marred by the sinful decision to reject God, bringing death and judgement. Sin resides deep within the hearts of each person and affects the entire being – the will, understanding, emotions, speech, relationships, behaviour and body. This fundamental rebellion gives rise to an endless variety of sinful values, habits, orientations, acts, thoughts and words. Sin entangles and damages each person to the very depths of their being. Our alienation from our Creator renders us spiritually dead.
- God’s Son, the man Jesus Christ, perfectly reflected God and showed us what humanity is meant to be. Jesus died and rose on behalf of sinful people to rescue them from the penalty of sin, conform them to His own image, and bring eternal life.

- The greatest need of humanity is to hear and be transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and so be transformed into the image of Christ through the work of the Spirit, which culminates in our resurrected bodies in the New Creation. This is the only true answer to our longings, and the true solution to the effects of sin on our bodies and experience.

Biological Sex, Gender, the Fall and Redemption

The Bible clearly states that God made humanity as male and female, and we can assume that gender and anatomical sex were created to be clearly aligned so that there was no confusion. God created ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ as intrinsically good. The man and woman were created to relate as necessary allies in God’s kingdom — being fruitful and multiplying, ruling under God, and bearing the image of God. The two were also created to be the two differentiated but integrated halves of a sexual whole or ‘oneness’ in marriage (Matt 19:4-5). Paul states that God’s ‘natural’ design for men and women, their bodies and the relationships between them, is worthy of honour (Romans 1v24-27).

Our biological sex, then, is an important aspect of the created order; and of human identity as God created it to be experienced. Therefore, biological sex and gender were designed to reflect God’s nature, and so to harmoniously align, such that a disjunction between gender identity and biological sex is not part of God’s good design.

The Fall introduces sin and frustration into our approach to God’s design for humanity. This expresses itself in many ways. The effects of sin and God’s curse in Genesis 3 — the ‘frustration’ experienced by God’s world (Romans 8), extends to our biology — our flesh.

One obvious change to our bodies is that we now decay and die (Genesis 3, 1 Corinthians 15). Our very biology has been rewired and pushed away from the created ideal by sin; so that the work of transformation and re-creation wrought by God through the Spirit is a process of transforming of our hearts and minds now, while we anticipate a resurrected body that is not subject to death and decay (Genesis 6:5, Psalm 51:5, Romans 7-8, 1 Corinthians 15). Our resurrected bodies, no longer frustrated by sin, disease, disorder, death and curse are things we wait for, while living as people whose hearts and minds — and identity — are being transformed as we have become the children of God again (Romans 8). We all live in this tension between flesh and spirit. Until then, our biology is frustrated so that God’s good design is no longer our experience. This is the position articulated by the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6, ‘Of the Fall of Man, of sin, and the punishment thereof’:

By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly **defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body**.

1 Corinthians 6:6-10 address biological sex and gender more specifically. Here Paul lists some of the habituated actions which have no place in the kingdom of God. Among them are homosexual acts. The Greek terms in this phrase refers to a male taking on a female ‘role’ in these acts. It seems here that one reason that the Bible prohibits homosexual acts is

because they are gender-shifting. This may also be an element in Paul's use of 'contrary to nature' in Romans 1v26-27. Paul's words also echo the Deuteronomic ban on cross dressing (Deut 22:5). There is evidence, then, that deliberate acts of gender shifting are sinful expressions of our fallen nature and, therefore, deeply damaging to people and those around them. It is vital to note that it is not being inclined to be tempted in a particular way that is sinful here – it is habitually and rebelliously choosing to act upon temptation that brings judgement. It is also vital to carefully discern between biblical purposes for gender and commitments to particular culturally determined gender expressions and stereotypes as discussed below.

Paul goes on to say that people such as those in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 must change what they habitually do (by the power of the Spirit) in order to be part of God's kingdom and look forward to the resurrection. There is no promise that God will bring a total change of desire before the resurrection. The Bible does, though, talk about a process of change or sanctification, a turning away from sin in both thought and deed, a longing to be restored to God's good design purposes that is lifelong and involves intense inner battle in the Spirit, looking to Christ for truth, help, hope and safety (Gal 5:16-24). Change requires continual reminder of God's compassion for everyone who struggles with the effects of this frustrated and fallen creation, His capacious and ongoing forgiveness for every sin, His intense delight and firm hold on his children, the transforming power of His Spirit and the hope of the new creation. The prayerful, faithful, hope-driven, sensitive and creative encouragement of Christian brothers and sisters over the Word, as well as well chosen medical and psychological help provided through His common grace, are also vital for change.

It is also extremely important to notice the full content of these verses. Habitual acts of gender shifting are amongst many sinful expressions of our fallen nature: those who engage in *all* forms sexual immorality, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers – none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. Acts of gender shifting are no 'worse' or more shocking than other sins. All those who have been washed in the name of Christ and by the Spirit are called to turn from any or all of these habitual behaviours. We stand beside our transgender friends and family in humility, as helpless sinners who have just as much need for the generous, powerful, sanctifying grace of God in Christ.

What is 'I': Understanding Intersex

Definitions of Intersex

This framework accounts for the existence of the medical phenomenon of *intersex*. Different health professionals have adopted different definitions for intersexuality to describe variances in sexual anatomy, chromosomal abnormalities, or other conditions.

The Australian Human Rights Commission defines intersex as:

“The term ‘intersex’ refers to people who are born with genetic, hormonal or physical sex characteristics that are not typically ‘male’ or ‘female’.”¹

The Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013 added the following definition to federal anti-discrimination law:

“intersex status means the status of having physical, hormonal or genetic features that are: (a) neither wholly female nor wholly male; or (b) a combination of female and male; or (c) neither female nor male.”²

The prevalence of intersexuality in our community

Using the broadest definition possible, one often cited figure puts the prevalence of intersexuality at 1.7% of births, while a more technical definition based on occasions “where chromosomal sex is inconsistent with phenotypic sex, or in which the phenotype is not classifiable as either male or female” suggests a prevalence of 0.018%.³

Whatever the prevalence, or definition, what is clear from the medical profession is that gender does not always occur, biologically, as a clear binary on rare occasions. In many of these cases a gender is assigned at birth by doctors making a judgment call, in consultation with parents, on what the most appropriate gender is to assign to a particular individual. Increasingly, the medical profession advocates intersex children choose their gender at puberty.

The prevalence of gender identity questions amongst those individuals who have presented as intersex and had a gender assigned to them at birth is significantly higher than in the general population, to the extent that medical professionals do not diagnose this as “Gender Dysphoria” but as a symptom of intersexuality.⁴

¹ Australian Human Rights Commission, “Resilient Individuals: Sexual Orientation Gender Identity & Intersex Rights 2015”, cited in Organisation Intersex International Australia Ltd, ‘What Is Intersex,’ <http://oii.org.au/18106/what-is-intersex/>

² The Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013, cited in OII Australia, What Is Intersex, <http://oii.org.au/18106/what-is-intersex/>

³ How common is intersex? A response to Anne Fausto-Sterling. J Sex Res, *The Journal of Sex Research* 39(3):174-8 · September 2002

⁴ Heino F. L. Meyer-Bahlburg, Intersexuality and the diagnosis of gender identity disorder, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, February 1994, Volume 23, Issue 1, pp 21-40, .
“Data on prevalence, age of onset or presentation, sex ratio, and associated or predictive factors also suggest marked differences between intersex patients with gender identity problems and nonintersex patients with GID. Patients with intersexuality or similar medical conditions should be excluded from the GID diagnosis.”

The prevalence of *intersexuality*, despite being quite low, does support the theological conclusion that our biology is frustrated such that God's good design is no longer the universal human experience.

What is 'T': Understanding Transgender

The existence of *intersexuality* is not a threat to a Christian belief in the created order and the goodness of God's design. While *intersexuality* is a different condition to conditions under the *transgender* umbrella,⁵ the existence of 'I' does at least position the issue in such a way that we might acknowledge that questions of biological sex and gender identity are complex matters where frustration, curse, and sin, are at play when it comes to 'T'.

Dr. Patricia Weerakoon defines the term 'transgender':

"Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth."⁶

In terms of the prevalence of this broad definition of transgender within the community at large, she says:

"At this broadest level, something like 1 in 300 to 1 in 500 people experience some kind of transgendered sense of themselves."

But when it comes to the smaller subset of people who experience gender dysphoria, "people who are convinced that they really are the opposite gender to the body they were born into" it's more like "1 in 10,000 to 1 in 30,000 people."⁷

Understanding gender: the difference between gender and sex

Gender and biological sex are two different concepts. Our biological sex is determined by our chromosomes and physical anatomy; our gender is an identity that overlays our experience in the world as individuals with this biology, broadly speaking it incorporates our understanding of maleness and femaleness, or masculinity and femininity.

We believe biological sex and gender were created to work in harmony in an individuals embodied experience of the world, but that this harmony is just as open to the effects of total depravity — of curse, frustration, and sin — as any other aspect of our humanity.

⁵ For a list of differences at law, in medicine and psychology, and socially, see:

<https://oii.org.au/18194/differences-intersex-trans/>

⁶ P & K Weerakoon, Gender Transitioning: Possibilities and Limitations, <http://thinkingofgod.org/2016/05/gender-transitioning-possibilities-limitations/>

⁷ P & K Weerakoon, Gender Transitioning: Possibilities and Limitations, <http://thinkingofgod.org/2016/05/gender-transitioning-possibilities-limitations/>

Where we would assume typically that our biological sex is essential to who we are — something natural that we are born with (apart from those born *intersex*) - our society has, for some time, assumed gender is a ‘constructed’ aspect of our humanity; a thing that individuals and cultures can shape for themselves, rather than being inherent to our humanity.

Different cultures do construct different norms for ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’; which suggests that features of gender are constructed. This is not to suggest that God did not create ideal forms of male and female; we see these ideals on display in creation and in the ongoing equality and difference between male and female described in the life of the church.

It is that gender identities can be meaningfully constructed, apart from God’s design, that makes the *queer* agenda to abolish all gender difference, such a powerful, damaging, and ungodly force in our world, but it is that gender difference is a fundamental human good that puts many in the transgender community at odds with the Queer community. As transgender advocate Catherine McGregor puts it:

“Most of us transition because gender is important to us and we feel torn between our anatomy and our psychology. Being told to live genderless would have killed me just as certainly as saying the Rosary to feel happily male.”⁸

Born this way? Is transgender always a choice?

Intersex individuals are certainly “born this way” – born with uncertain biological sex characteristics. The question is, is this also true for transgender individuals experiencing Gender Dysphoria? More specifically, are transgender born with their true identity residing in their brains, as opposed to their bodies?

The science surrounding transgender issues is still being explored and no consensus has been reached yet. There are a range of theories of causation but environment and nurture seem to play a significant role. There may be some biological component but this is very unclear.

In a separate article Dr Weerakoon sums up the status of current understanding of gender dysphoria:

“Gender dysphoria used to be considered a version of body dysmorphia – a mental condition where people are convinced that their body is injured or deformed in some way, while their body is observably healthy. While we don’t rule this out, we think it’s too simplistic to say that all occurrences of gender dysphoria – or transgender identity more broadly – is always an instance of body dysmorphia. Some recent brain studies have suggested that transgendered people’s brains may develop differently from cisgendered

⁸ <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/i-am-transgender-and-i-oppose-safe-schools/news-story/7e194d1cc3037b6966b9fdab59871bf9>

people. The research is new, the evidence is tentative. But it means we have to leave open the possibility that transgender identity might have some as-yet-undiscovered neurobiological cause.”⁹

Scientists have begun conducting examinations of the brains of individuals experiencing gender dysphoria, people who might join the *transgender* community and identify as such, or transition to identifying as a gender other than their biological sex at birth. These studies of the brains of particular individuals suggest that those experiencing gender dysphoria may do so because of fundamental differences in the male and female brain.¹⁰ This is coherent with the theological position outlined above, that sin has fundamentally altered our biology away from the created order, and that our earthly bodies are now subject to curse and frustration.

However, some important notes of caution must be sounded here. Firstly, brain imaging doesn't provide anything like a window into thoughts. The brain is very much harder to more complex to 'read' and conceptualise than sexual features of the body. Secondly, Scripture warns us against a view of brain versus body as divided rather than as an integrated whole. Thirdly, our brains are fed, nurtured and shaped by our environment and experiences, particularly as children and teenagers. If a person is, indeed, born with biological features damaged by the fall in this respect, he/she is certainly not culpable for that. However, he/she has both moral choices to make in response to that. There is a complex, mutually influential and incremental interplay between brain, body, soul, experiences and environment. Importantly, our brains and, indeed, our 'selves' are also shaped by the thoroughly penetrative action of sin and by the powerful work of the Spirit. The brain alone is not, therefore, entirely determinative of who we are, what we desire and what we do.

How Christians can engage with Intersex or Transgender individuals and communities

1. Listen

First of all, we must be talking to transgender people, sharing life with them as friends, praying for them, and listening to their stories even as we share our own. The experience of being human is different, and complex, for every individual and community. We should not presume to understand life as a *transgender* or *intersex* individual, or the shared life of people in these communities. We have certainty about God's design for biological sex and gender; but the experience of these facets of our identity, and other facets like sexual orientation, after the fall, will be as diverse as the affect of God's curse and the frustration of creation is on our biology, our desires, and our imaginations.

⁹ <http://www.biblesociety.org.au/news/eternity-on-transgender-and-transitioning>

¹⁰ <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/is-there-something-unique-about-the-transgender-brain/>

2. Show them the gospel

Transgender and Intersex individuals, like all of us, bear the image of God but have rejected God and live with the frustration and sadness of the curse. We are cursed to live by dusty flesh, not by God's life-giving Spirit, and the consequence of this curse is frustration of God's design and death. This is true for all people, and it grieves us, as Christians, to see people living apart from God's good design, to experience the world as cursed, and to see this curse and frustration causing harm to others. Like the earth itself we groan, longing for all things to be made new.

However, we do not seek to place people under the burden of moralism but seek to introduce them to God in His convicting and liberating Word. Transgender people are, like all of us, called to turn from sin and towards Christ, finding their primary identity *in Christ* and to anticipate the re-creation of our cursed, frustrated, and dying bodies at the resurrection, when Jesus makes all things new.

The hope we offer our Transgender and Intersex neighbours is the hope we offer all people, an identity beyond our sexual orientation and gender — and an identity beyond our dying and frustrated bodies. We offer the good news that we can know ourselves truly at the feet of our creator and redeemer, as those united with Christ and as heirs of God's new creation.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” — Galatians 3:26-29

Our transgender and intersex brothers and sisters, should they put their faith in Christ, are living testimonies to the hope that we have that all things will be made new, that one day our minds and bodies will be resurrected and restored to a new, heavenly reality. Again, we should not expect all frustration to be dealt before Christ returns — that restoration will come fully and finally in the new creation where we are made new, and the curse and its affects are obliterated.

Therefore, we show great love to our transgender neighbours by asking them to church with us, opening the Bible with them, patiently and faithfully reaching out to them with the gospel. We can boldly introduce them to Jesus, through His Word, even if we don't feel we have a thorough understanding of gender issues and even though we may make many mistakes, because we trust in the grace and power of God to save.

3. Remember their vulnerability and pain

The realities for Transgender and Intersex individuals within, or outside, the church is that they often feel isolated. In addition, the prevalence of mental health issues within the intersex community are not well documented, but studies suggest trans people are:

- About **six** times more likely to be seriously depressed
- More than **eight** times more likely to attempt suicide
- More than **three** times more likely to abuse illegal drugs.¹¹

Gender dysphoria is, for many, an oppressive, profoundly distressing and shame producing experience. It is important that in speaking to, or about, these communities we do not worsen their pain with our own self righteousness, lack of love, lack of grace, neglect, discomfort or fear.

4. Helping people with Gender Dysphoria

Respected Christian sexologist, Dr Patricia Weerakoon, and her son, Presbyterian minister Kamal Weerakoon spoke on Gender Identity and Sexuality in a lecture at Sydney's New College. These words are worth considering as we respond to complex issues of biological sex and gender in a fallen world:

*"The hope of restoration has come through Christ, giving an opportunity to overcome dissonance with a renewed identity. Gender is not all you are but it's right to feel you want a clear one... When Christ returns each person will be fully gender restored and the complementarity of Trinity and Christ and the church will be reflected in God's sons and daughters. Transgender people may not experience rest until then."*¹²

They published an article *Gender Transitioning: It's Possibilities and Limitations*, which provides a useful threefold structure for approaching different individuals, while acknowledging the diversity and complexity under the transgender and intersex umbrellas. These don't necessarily work to push the transgendered individual to the *identity* they feel they are struggling with, but to mediate against unnecessary and potentially harmful intervention (like gender reassignment surgery) that has no guarantee of success.

a. Acknowledge the created goodness of *binary* gender

*"While transgendered people are, by definition, not clear on their gender, we think it is better to encourage them to identify as a gender – either male or female – rather than letting them continue drifting in uncertainty."*¹³

b. Acknowledge that our identities are 'given' not simply created by our own will

¹¹ United States Center for Disease Control (2014)

¹² Dr P and K Weerakoon, "Gender Identity and Sexuality" lecture at New College at the University of New South Wales - <http://www.iscast.org/node/968>

¹³ P & K Weerakoon, *Gender Transitioning: Possibilities and Limitations*, <http://thinkingofgod.org/2016/05/gender-transitioning-possibilities-limitations/>

“Our personal identity does not simply flow out from within ourselves; it is given to us, from outside ourselves, by those who love us. Our parents bring us up as a boy or girl. Our siblings relate to us as brother or sister. To our extended family, we are nephew or niece, uncle or aunt. We are mother or father to our children. If we are Christian, then our most significant identity – ‘in Christ’ – is given to us, from outside ourselves, by the God who loves us.

This means that in ministering to transgender people, we should try to honour the relationships they are in, and their identity within those relationships, as much as possible. We propose this as an attitude, not an unbreakable law. Those who love the transgendered person would presumably, precisely because they love them, want to help them live well.”¹⁴

c. Acknowledge that our existence is ‘embodied’ — that our physical bodies do matter

“Jesus became incarnate, healed bodily diseases, and was raised bodily. That means we should, as much as possible, strive to be content with our bodies, and not hastily change them.

One way we can manage dysphoria without necessarily changing our body is to think creatively about gender expression – how we live out and enact being the man or woman that we are. This means thinking beyond the taken-for-granted stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which we inherit from our culture. Even if these stereotypes happen to be consistent with the Bible, they cannot limit healthy gender expression, because they are only human cultural constructs...

We need to attend to a transgendered person’s mental health before seeking to change their body. While not all transgender merely an occurrence of body dysmorphia, we need to consider it as a possibility. Many transgender people suffer other mental health issues – depression, anxiety, etc. – which need to be addressed anyway, so that they’re in a sufficiently healthy state of mind to make decisions about their body.

Even if a transgendered person’s well-being requires modifying their body, full transitioning is only one option among many – and the most extreme one at that. We can manage the dysphoria through staged intervention, beginning with hormonal treatment – which is minimally invasive and maximally reversible – through partially reversible partial transitioning... and only finally, as an absolute last resort, ending in full transitioning.”

Sexuality, Gender, and Idolatry: Queer theory as the deliberate attempt to eradicate God’s design

While Transgender and Intersex communities are grappling with the frustration of our biology, and with our sinful inclination to adopt an identity apart from God, there is another ‘gender’ identity to consider; those who adopt the ‘Queer’ label. This label is typically

¹⁴ P & K Weerakoon, Gender Transitioning: Possibilities and Limitations, <http://thinkingofgod.org/2016/05/gender-transitioning-possibilities-limitations/>

adopted by those in the *transgender* and *intersex* communities who are seeking to live without a binary gender identity. Sometimes the 'Queer' label simply acknowledges the complexity of biological sex and gender for particular individuals, but it represents a deliberate decision, by these individuals, to adopt this complexity as an identity; rather than seek the clarity of an identity built on a binary gender (male or female), or sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual).

This, at some level, is a deliberate decision to embrace fallen, sin distorted reality, it represents an inability, or failure, to see God's good design — a volitional, or non-volitional, suppression of truths about God (Romans 1:18-20).

The distinction between 'Queer' Identity and the Queer agenda

There are some within this Queer community with more radical aims, who are much more intentional in their ambition not just to embrace fallenness but entrench it as the desirable norm for all people. These aims are more troubling for Christians, and have damaging implications not just for Biblical and traditional views of gender and sexuality, but for the community at large.

Queer theorists seek eradication of gender and sexual orientation binaries for all people. This, at times, is paired with a Marxist political ideology, this is especially the case for Roz Ward, a transgender academic who is one of the architects of the Safe Schools material. Ward describes her political and queer agenda in a speech given to the 2015 Marxism Conference as implementing Marxist social change by doing away with the binary gender and sexual orientations advocated by the 'ruling class':

“... the ruling class has benefited, and continues to benefit, from oppressing our bodies, our relationships, sexuality and gender identities alongside sexism, homophobia and transphobia.

Both serve to break the spirits of ordinary people, to consume our thoughts, to make us accept the status quo and for us to keep living or aspiring to live, or feel like we should live, in small social units and families where we must reproduce and take responsibility for those people in those units... Marxism offers both the hope and the strategy needed to create a world where human sexuality, gender and how we relate to our bodies can blossom in extraordinarily new and amazing ways that we can only try to imagine today, because Marxism has a theory of social change.”¹⁵

While the transgender and intersex experiences outlined above revolve around non-volitional sin and the cursed frustration of the creation, this Queer theory is a deliberate and idolatrous attempt to eradicate God's good design for humanity (though Ward lays the blame for this design on the 'ruling class'). This ideology is the product of minds given over by God to no longer being able to identify the goodness of the created world as God made it (Romans 1:18-32).

¹⁵ Roz Ward, Safer Schools or a Radical Marxist Sexual revolution?, Online Opinion, <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=18033&page=0>

As Christians we must affirm God’s good design, and the restoration of it through Jesus, as the answer to the frustration of our experiences of biological sex and gender in this world. Queer theorists identify the same problem that we do, but offer a solution that is the polar opposite of the hope found in the Gospel; restoration of the clarity of gender identity and biological sex that has been obscured and lost for some as a result of the Fall.

This clarity — the clarity of binary gender categories where biology and identity align — is also precisely what members of the transgender and intersex communities often express a deep longing for... for example, Catherine McGregor, in describing her decision to oppose the Safe Schools program said:

“None of this gave me any joy. I risk hurting the feelings of some wonderful parents with wonderful trans kids. But I am more than my gender and that portion of the Left with which Ward is aligned sickens me nearly as much as the ratbags of Reclaim Australia. Moreover, Safe Schools teaches a derivative of Queer Theory, which I believe leads trans people into a blind alley.”¹⁶

Real hope does not lie in the eradication of gender difference or of binary sexual orientations, but in the restoration and recreation of our humanity so that we experience gender difference as God designed it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we affirm the goodness of God’s design for bodies, minds and gender. The fall damages us in myriad different and complex ways. But we are all responsible for all the big and little ways we choose to accept or reject God’s design. We approach transgender people as fellow sinners, earnestly desiring to hold out the gospel of salvation to them in love; encouraging them on the long road of sanctification through the Spirit, reminding each other of the capacious grace and safety God’s grace (completed only in the new creation); and that we find our true selves, not in our brains, bodies, experiences or others’ affirmation, but at the feet of Jesus.

¹⁶ <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/i-am-transgender-and-i-oppose-safe-schools/news-story/7e194d1cc3037b6966b9fdab59871bf9>