

5. Should we vote for the Blackburn motion?

As we saw in the introduction, the motion put forward to General Synod by Blackburn diocese is as follows:

That this Synod, recognising the need for transgender people to be welcomed and affirmed in their parish church, calls on the House of Bishops to consider whether some nationally commended liturgical materials might be prepared to mark a person's gender transition.

As we also saw in chapter 1, if this motion were to be passed and then implemented it would mean that the Church of England as a whole accepted the claim that someone can be a woman with male biology and vice versa.

The question we have considered in the remainder of this report is whether it would be right to accept this claim. What has become clear in the course of this consideration is the answer to this question is 'no' for two reasons.

First, as we have seen, the arguments that have been put forward in support of gender transition are unpersuasive:

- a) It does not make theological sense to claim that the transcendent creator God of the Bible is either intersex or transgender.
- b) It is inconsistent with a belief in God's goodness to say that he has deliberately created people who have an incongruity between their perception of their sexual identity and the sexual identity of their bodies.
- c) There is no convincing scientific evidence to support the idea that people who are transgender have a brain that is of the opposite sex to that of their bodies and is in line with their perception of their sexual identity.
- d) It is not clear why we should accept the claim that transgender people make about their sexual identity given that we would not accept a similar claim about someone's race or species. 'I say I am X' is not in itself a convincing argument.
- e) The idea that someone can have a sexual identity that is the opposite to that of their body is incoherent. To be male or female has to do with the sex of a person's body. The claim that someone's self is

male or female when that self has no corresponding male or female body thus does not make any sense.

- f) The claim that gender transition is the best way to help someone with gender dysphoria is called into question by the available evidence which fails to demonstrate that transition is successful in resolving the mental and physical health issues experienced by transgender people. Scepticism about gender transition is expressed both by well qualified experts in the field of mental health and by a growing number of people who are explaining the reasons why, having gone through gender transition, they then decided to revert back to living in their birth sex.
- g) The idea that someone can have a sexual identity that is opposite to that of their body is inconsistent with the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 and with the anthropology of the Bible as a whole. These teach us that God has created human beings as embodied creatures who are either male or female dependent upon the nature of their embodiment and that their God given vocation to reproduce is fulfilled by men reproducing as fathers and women as mothers.
- h) The Biblical account of creation does not leave space for people who are neither male nor female and what we know about intersex conditions tells us that people who have these conditions are not a third sex, but someone whose body has developed in a way that is disordered in some way so that it is not either male or female in the way that human bodies are meant to be.
- i) The idea that eunuchs are biblical role models for the acceptance of gender transition falls foul of the fact that eunuchs in the Bible are simply men who cannot have children, either because of disease, castration or voluntary celibacy.
- j) The fact that the language used to describe the Church in the New Testament mixes male and female imagery does not negate the fact that the New Testament consistently makes a distinction between men and women. Likewise, Galatians 3:28 does not teach that the sexual distinction between men and women has been abolished in Christ, but rather teaches that both men and women alike can receive through faith the blessing promised to Abraham.
- k) The biblical vision of a renewed creation and its account of the resurrection of the dead do not give support to gender transition because the Bible teaches that when creation is renewed we shall inhabit God's kingdom with the same sexed bodies we have at

present albeit animated by God's Spirit and thereby rendered immortal.

- l) The change in people's names in the Bible (as in Abram to Abraham or Simon to Peter) is never linked to a change in sexual identity.
- m) The prohibition of cross dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5 is relevant to the transgender issue because it expresses the principle that in accordance with creation men should live as men and women as women, a principle reiterated in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.
- n) The fact that Jesus was miraculously born of the Virgin Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit does not mean that he was intersex, the fact that he was 'queer' in the sense of nonconforming does not mean that he rejected the Jewish belief in the distinction between men and women (an idea for which there is no evidence) and the fact that he was both human and divine and went through a series of changes or 'transitions' in the course of his ministry does not mean that there are people who are somehow in essence both male and female or that gender transition is theologically acceptable.
- o) Those who oppose gender transition should not be seen as being like Job's comforters. Job's comforters spoke untruthfully about God while those opposed to the concept of gender transition are truthfully describing how God has created human beings and desires that they should live.

Secondly, as we have also seen, there is an alternative and preferable Christian framework for looking at the phenomenon of gender transition and the appropriate way to offer pastoral care for transgender people.

This framework starts off by noting that both the Bible and the study of nature teach us that human beings have been created as bodily creatures who are either male or female depending on how their bodies are formed for the purpose of sexual reproduction.

This basic bodily distinction between male and female, which the Bible teaches will continue in the world to come, can be seen, in accordance with the teaching of Genesis 1:31, as something that is 'very good' because (a) the ability to sexually reproduce allows the human race to survive and (b) sexual desire, sexual reproduction and the institution of marriage associated with them, point us to the passionate, fruitful and faithful nature of God's love for us and all creation and to

our communion with God in the world to come as the ultimate fulfilment of all our earthly desires.

These things being so, the calling of human beings is to accept with gratitude God's creation of us as either men or women and to live faithfully before God as either men or women as created.

This calling is challenged by those secular and theological voices who argue that human beings should move beyond the 'gender binary' of men and women either to a world in which there are multiple forms of sexual identity or to a totally sexless form of human existence. This form of thinking is an example of the primary sin of trying to be like God by determining for ourselves what human existence should be like (eating of 'the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' Genesis 2:17).

Those who undergo gender transition do not reject the distinction between men and women, but they do believe that their true sex is different from that of their bodies and that they should seek to live according to their true sex, changing their bodies where necessary in order to try to achieve this.

From a Christian theological perspective this belief and the action that flows from it have to be seen as a manifestation of human sinfulness. According to biblical teaching, all human beings are sinners as a consequence of the sin of Adam and this means that they have a fallen nature which manifests itself in wrong thinking, wrong desiring and wrong acting. In the case of those involved in gender transition this means specifically a wrong belief that they have a sex which is different from that of their body, a wrong desire to live as a member of that sex and wrong acting in trying to bring that about instead of living as the person God made them to be.

Pastoral care for transgender people needs to start off by welcoming them unconditionally as those made in God's image whom he cares for as a widow cares for a lost coin, a shepherd cares for a lost sheep and father cares for a lost son (Luke 15:1-32). However it cannot stop there.

Transgender people, just like all other human beings, are enslaved by the world, the flesh and the Devil and are subject to judgement and eternal death. However, God in his great mercy has acted to deliver them from their captivity and to raise them to a new life with Christ, a new life which is received through faith and baptism. Pastoral care therefore has to mean not only welcoming transgender people, but seeking to ensure that they believe and are baptised. This is the top

spiritual priority that needs to precede addressing the issue of their sexual identity.

Nonetheless, because those who have been given new life have to live it out in obedience to God in the power of the Spirit this issue does need to be addressed. Living out the new life Christ has given them has to mean for transgender people seeking to live as the people God made them to be. Pastoral care therefore means seeking to help people either not to go through with gender transition or to revert to living according to their true sex if they have done so. This will be a hard road to travel and ministers and congregations have to be prepared to travel it with them, however long it takes, and even if there are relapses on the way.

Because the arguments for the acceptance of gender transition are unpersuasive, and in the light of this alternative way of looking at the issue, it would clearly be wrong to vote yes to the Blackburn motion.

To develop and commend a form of liturgy to mark gender transition would mean:

- The Church of England declaring untruthfully to those both inside and outside the Church that someone's true sex can be different from the sex of their body.
- The Church of England failing to make clear to those inside and outside the Church that undergoing gender transition is something that is contrary to God's will and so should not be undertaken, however desirable it might seem.
- The Church of England failing to make clear to those inside and outside the Church that both theology and non-theological research show us that a process of gender transition is not the best way forward for those with gender dysphoria and that a better approach is a combination of pastoral care allied with psychiatric support where needed to help people to learn to live as members of the sex into which they were born.

These are three things that the Church of England must not do and so the Blackburn proposal needs to be rejected.

Instead, the Church of England needs (a) to produce clear teaching explaining the nature of our sexual identity and why this is a good gift from God and (b) to develop the resources which are at the moment sadly lacking to help clergy and others provide transgender people with effective pastoral care.