



**Pastoral Educational Resources for Supporting Transgender Christians
in the Anglican Church of Canada**

A Resource for Study, Reflection, and Discussion

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Introduction

Our society's consciousness of the full science behind gender identity is something that is still growing; our Christian appropriation of new learnings from science is slower, but the witness of transgender and gender non-binary persons to the Gospel compels us to learn. For we who have our identity in Christ, as Christ's own, the determinants of gender are part of who we are in offering our whole selves to God, and there is ample doctrinal ground and biblical witness to open questions about maleness, femaleness, creatureliness and identity boldly by listening to. It is important to listen to and to walk with those who have gone through their own processes and journeys with respect to their particular gender identities.

Some Churches of The Anglican Communion have shaped responses to this sort of listening. In a pattern that parallels much in the way of the development of pastoral liturgy, responses begin from within the realities of people in the body of Christ living in their particular bodies in particular places and times. It is within the immediacy of pastoral relationships in communities of disciples that transgender persons are to be found or are not seen, are welcomed or rejected, and are honoured as members of the body of Christ, or have their gifts rebuffed before they are even known.

In the fall of 2020, the Faith, Worship, and Ministry committee began to meet on a regular basis with a group of fifteen Anglicans, most of whom are transgender or gender non binary, with a few identified allies. Several are priests and theological students in formation for ordained ministry, others come from deep and extensive roles in leadership within the church. From those meetings has grown *Pastoral Liturgies for Journeys of Gender Affirmation*. In tandem with this work, the group shared resources for pastoral education within the church and other educational tools such as bibliographies.

The group became more aware of the existence of pastoral liturgies developed with diocesan approval in parishes in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Anglican Church of Australia, and the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia. They also learned of official national initiatives in both the Church of England and in the Episcopal Church (USA). In 2017, the Church of England's General Synod approved *Pastoral Guidance for use in conjunction with the Affirmation of Baptismal*

*Faith in the context of gender transition*¹. The following year the National Convention of the Episcopal Church approved a new book of *Occasional Services* containing *A Service of Renaming*². Though its use can be imagined for a variety of pastoral contexts, the rubrics are clear in identifying gender as a predominant factor in the design of the liturgy.

Our church's commitment to stand against the abuse and torment of gender queer people³ compels us to us to seek out and to eliminate the roots of that torment and to listen to their stories and to seek wisdom together on matters having to do with the mysteries of human gender and theological anthropology. There is a growing community of gender non-binary and transgender theologians, including Anglicans, publishing in what is becoming a growing field of study, from which the church can learn. There has been much attention given to matters of human sexuality by The Anglican Church of Canada, but very little to matters of gender, and the two fields of study are very distinct.

Transgender Pastoral Reflections is offered as an introduction for Canadian Anglicans to some of the ways in which the reflected experiences of transgender and gender non binary Christians engage with Scripture and with the church's living tradition and witness to the Gospel. Included is a theological article, "Gender, Grammar, and God," and an article on pastoral care and presence with transgender persons in the church. A comprehensive annotated bibliography of approximately forty entries concludes the resource by pointing readers to the growing wealth of Christian writing from a transgender and gender non binary perspective in fields of theology, biblical study, ethics, pastoral care, and liturgy.

It is expected that this resource will expand in time to include additional resources such as biblical commentaries and studies, personal stories, and more contextual theological

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Pastoral%20Guidance-Affirmation-Baptismal-Faith.pdf>

² https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/01/lm_book_of_occasional_services_2018.pdf

³ In 2010, Act #75 of the General Synod of 2010 committed our church, nationally, to "1. Deplore any legislation calling for punishments for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their supporters and encourage our partners in jurisdictions with such legislation to do the same; and 2. Request the Anglican Church of Canada at all levels to embrace the outcast and stand against the abuse and torment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons."

reflections. For now, the annotated bibliography provides guidance to this resource-rich growing field of study.

1. Scripture and Tradition: Theology

I

The recent debate over the marriage canon of the Anglican Church of Canada has revealed at least two major theological fault lines, both deeply underexamined. One is how we think about the theological nature of committed partnership (and, secondarily, how this relates to the institutions known as “marriage” at various times and places). But the other, more foundational and ultimately more important, is how we think about gender, both in the order of creation and in the order of redemption, and in our language about God and humanity, and whether our scripture and tradition actually tie us into a simple gender binary to anything like the extent we have believed for the last few centuries.

How a faith system thinks about gender with relationship to the divine, and gender with relationship to humanity, do not necessarily have to be directly connected (or, humans being what we are, even coherently related). In Christianity specifically, however, there is an unavoidable connection, which is the body of Jesus, the place where divinity and humanity meet; and so, how we think about that body matters in particular. But even aside from that crucial intersection, it is perhaps worth rehearsing a few basic things about gender within the Trinitarian God of orthodox Christian theology.

The God we encounter in the Hebrew scriptures is clearly somewhere past the horizon of all human concepts, and to speak to, or of, this God pushes at the edge of language. God has several names or appellations – the one most resembling a proper name is unpronounceable, unsayable, and seems to translate broadly into something like “I AM THAT I AM.” The second most common way of naming God in the Hebrew scriptures, the word *Elohim*, is a plural formation treated as singular, a violation of human grammar in its nature. If this confusing God has any pronoun at all, it is “I”. God, in fact, has a unique claim to this pronominal status, and may be the only one who can use

first person with complete accuracy, the one who has absolute being, selfhood, and existence, from which all of our existences and identities are derived; we are “I” only insofar as we participate in the great “I” of God. It is the first person voice which speaks through the prophets, the *ego eimi* of Jesus which moves through the gospels and climaxes at the moment in the garden when Jesus steps out towards the soldiers and says simply, like the voice from the burning bush, “I am.” Ideally, we do not speak of God, but simply allow God to speak.

But of course, we do speak of God, and on some level we must speak of God; nevertheless, we must also understand that doing so moves us inevitably into the territory of approximation and error.

That approximation and error are confounded by the fact that most modern readers are reading texts in translation. Biblical Hebrew, *koine* Greek, and Aramaic (which is not a language in which our texts are written, but is probably what Jesus spoke, and may underlie some of the Greek texts) are all highly inflected languages. English is a weakly inflected language, and that alone changes the nuances of pronoun usage. All nouns in Hebrew, Aramaic, and *koine* Greek must take a gender – in Hebrew and Aramaic only masculine or feminine, in *koine* masculine, feminine or neuter – but there is no sense that this necessarily attaches any actual gender identity to the thing named. In fact, to take one interesting example, the sun, as noun, has changed gender between ancient Hebrew and modern Hebrew, but no one is going to suggest that this means that the sun itself has transitioned from male to female. Sometimes the gender of the noun matters, sometimes it does not, and those of us who are many centuries away from the original language and culture may not be the best judges of exactly how much it matters in specific complex cases (God being always a complex case).

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures God is compared to, among other things, a betrayed husband, a nursing mother, a king, and a nesting hen. The two most common names for God in the Hebrew scripture are both more or less masculine in grammatical gender, but, as noted, *Elohim* is also ambiguously plural, meaning that a simple treatment of grammatical categories as indicating identity might go in a disturbing direction. It is a bit of a struggle to pin *YHWH* down grammatically, though it appears to be basically

grammatically masculine; but it is generally a mistake to try to pin God down on any front, and human grammar does not necessarily operate in the divine realm.

In Christian theology, we can consider the clear fact that at least one person of the Trinity definitely does not use male pronouns – the word “Spirit” is feminine in Hebrew and Aramaic, and neuter in *koine*. It is also the case, as Gregory of Nazianzus pointed out in his 31st Oration, that a word commonly used for the concept of the Godhead, *theotita*, is feminine in Greek. It is important to stress that these are highly inflected languages, and this does not mean that we are to think of the Holy Spirit as female, or indeed non-binary, in anything like a human fashion, any more than the fact that the common words for “God” usually take a masculine pronoun in these languages means that we should think that God is a very large man.

Rather, this multiplicity of pronominal forms is another indicator that human grammars are all inadequate to express the grammar of the pluralsingular malefemale God, that all our categories of gender and number, not to mention time, extension, and sequence, among others, are constantly cut across, upturned, and made relatively wrong – though still beloved, insofar as they express the struggles of beloved creatures towards the great source of love.

II

There is a risk that we may, in the reasonable desire to think about a God who contains and transcends human gender, simply to put both sides of the human gender binary into our picture of God and call the job done – to see God as having “feminine” aspects because we may see nurturance, self-sacrifice, receptivity, and even, within the Trinitarian dynamic, a kind of mutual submission. We do see all these things; but automatically to think about these as something like a female principle within God mostly serves to entrench our ideas about which characteristics should belong to which bodies in the human world. God is more complicated than that; and while gender is not as complicated as God, it is certainly complicated enough to require more nuanced treatment. We exist as bodies, complex and differentiated bodies which have profound particularized experiences of birth, joy, desire, work, illness, blood, and death, but which are also incorporated into the Body of Christ which extends beyond the

possibilities of any individual body. We exist within, around, and against constructions of sex and gender, historically and socially inflected; we may claim or resist the categories given us, or we may find ways to do both at the same time. And in all this, we strive to define the content of our obedience.

One interesting example of a writer playing both with and against established ideas about God and gender, and in the process creating a new social category for herself, was the woman we call Julian of Norwich, a late 14th/early 15th century anchoress, enclosed in rooms attached to the church of St Julian, and one of the first creative vernacular theologians in the English language, at a time when the role of theological authority was not normally available to women. She was able to do this in part because she presented her work as a description of an intense visionary experience which she had, while suffering a serious physical illness, at the age of thirty; but in fact, the experience itself occupies very little of the text compared to her complex and subtle theological interpretations of it.

Julian's work has suffered considerably from the pull-quote phenomenon, and she is best known for a few vivid sentences torn from their context, and frequently misunderstood. Many people are probably aware that Julian talks about Christ as our mother. This image was, in fact, quite common at the time, despite the fact that Julian is currently held up as if she were the first person ever to think of it. In fact, this imagery was very common in the later medieval period, but for the most part, the writers who used it employed very traditional gender categories and simply transposed normal social constructs of femininity onto the mother-Chris – tenderness, compassion, nurturance, and so forth. This in itself is surprising to modern readers, and can at least slightly destabilize our thinking about the nature of Christ, but it does not, very much, change what we think “men” and “women” in this world are supposed to be. Julian is doing something different, and something with little or no precedent.

I want to look especially at one intriguing feature of her book – Julian's use of the identification of the Second Person of the Trinity as Wisdom. This identification is also not, in itself, original or even very unusual; there is a long tradition of theological reflection on Wisdom/Sophia, frequently identified with Christ. But Julian will use it in original and unusual ways, drawing Christ as Wisdom together with the image of

Christ as mother, reframing Christology, anthropology, gender and opening a way for her to reframe her understanding of her own self.

Unlike any other writer of the period, Julian proposes that Wisdom/Logos is naturally considered as our mother in part because wisdom is, inherently, a quality belonging to mothers. "To the properte of moderhede longeth kynd, love, wisdom and knowing, and it is god." In fact, "wysdom" I Julian's text is not applied first to Christ, but to that exemplary mother, Mary, whom Julian sees in the early moments of her visionary experiences, able to receive God's message because she is already characterized by "hyghe wysdom and truth."

This is quite exceptional. "Wysdom and knowyng" were simply not qualities associated with mothers, or women in general, in medieval discourse. Maternal imagery might be positively associated with mercy and compassion – there is a truly disturbing example of this in *Ancrene Wisse*, where Jesus, like an abused wife, interposes himself between the wrathful Father and the disobedient child and accepts a death-blow in the child's place, and rather less troubling uses in writers like Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux, who give us a Mother-Christ who feeds, nurtures, and cherishes us. But nowhere is it supposed that "wysdom and knowyng" are part of a mother's work.

Julian, however, writing from the social world of mothers and children, is quite aware that a mother does not only give birth to a child and nurse it, that in fact these are quite a small part of what mothering really means; she is largely responsible for shaping the child as a person, and this requires intelligence. "And evyr as it waxith in age and stature, she channgyth her werks, but nott her love... The moder may suffer the chylde to fall some tyme and be dyssesed on dyverse manner, for the one profyte, but she may nevyr suffer that ony manner of perell come to her chylde."

This, our constant interaction with God as part of our development, is what Julian calls the "moderhed in werkyng" – a motherhood which, it must be noted, does not require biological femaleness – and is one of three forms of motherhood which she sees in Christ, the other two being "oure kynde making" and "taking of oure kynde... moderhed of grace." The first two are both roughly analogous to physical childbearing,

and pertain respectively to Christ's role as an agent of creation, which causes us to be one with God in our "substance" from our making, and to the Incarnation, which unites our fallen "sensuality" with our substance. In both, we see the "mutual enclosure" of God and the soul; "[hyely] owe to enjoye that god dwellyth in oure soule; and more hyly we owe to enjoye that oure soule dwellyth in god." Or to quote one of Julian's most unusual images: "The depe wysdom of the trynyte is our moder, in whom we be closed ...oure savyoure is oure very moder, in whom we all be endlessly borne and nevyr shall come out of hym." Julian, obviously, feels no need to simplify gender. She easily speaks of "our moder" using "he" pronouns, and it troubles her not at all to give us the picture of a male mother endlessly bearing us.

And in the third kind of motherhood, that of "werkyng," we are called to imagine, even more, a human person changing, growing, and developing in a relationship with God. Biological reproduction, even as an image, is not the meaning of motherhood; the male mother who endlessly carries and produces us also forms us, teaches us, in an extended, developmental, even narrative shaping.

As Julian struggled with her understanding of her visions, she struggled as well with her own position as a woman, a body assigned to particular social roles and spaces, one not expected or normally permitted to be a "techere" or an interpreter of texts. And yet, she clearly understood that she had the authority not only of someone who had received a series of unique revelations, but also of someone who had the intellectual acumen to derive complex meaning from them. It would seem that motherhood, given her knowledge that good mothering requires not only compassion but also cleverness, became an important image, and her equation of Wisdom with motherhood, and thus the incorporation of mothering within the Trinity, turned into, among other things, a guiding metaphor which helped her find her own way, as a female-identified person claiming, with no outside authority to validate her, a traditionally "male" position.

All of this, of course, deals with only one small feature of Julian's magisterial work, most of which is not about motherhood or gender at all. And the dilemmas she wrestled with in her time, with the particular restrictions and opportunities available in her social setting, are not the same as ours; for the most part, at least in the Anglican church, women do not need to undertake special theological manoeuvres in order to be

recognized as capable of teaching authority. But there are, needless to say, many issues which women and queer people (as well as racialized people, and other marginalized groups) must confront in trying to live out their Christian commitments and particular vocations.

Julian's perceptions that the body of Chris is impossible to tie down to rigid conceptions of gender, that mother and the female body need not be co-extensive, and that the production and reproduction of ensouled persons, both at the divine and at the human level, involves a kind of narrative unfolding which is by no means limited by biology, are capable of being usefully engaged in our current dilemmas. But primarily, I have presented this glimpse here in the hope that it might be an example of how theology can both use and subvert socially given gender categories in sometimes unexpected ways, and in that use and subversion take us at least some way towards the realization of our own contexts, eluding social captivity in the work of a deeper obedience to the Word.

III

How, then, do we create a Christian anthropology for our own time, which is obedient to the complex grammar of the triune God? I would like to turn next to what might seem one of the less promising parts of scripture – the third chapter of Genesis, the story of the “fall.”

Sexual differentiation of some kind already exists in the story before we reach Genesis 3, has existed since the woman was formed from the bone and flesh of the original human creature in the second creation account, told in Genesis 2. Now, it is far from clear whether, in the original creation, the creature is sexually differentiated. The human being is called *ha'adam*, which may not be a name so much as a descriptor. The author of Genesis 2 appears to derive it from *adamah*, earth. Though the actual derivation is more likely from the Hebrew word for “red” or the Sumerian word for “to make”, it would seem that the Genesis 2 author's intention is for the original human to be “the creature of earth.” The Hebrew *adam* does not necessarily signal maleness. The word *ish*, which indicates specifically a male human being, does not appear in the text until after the creation of the female human, *ishshah*, later given the name Eve. (To be

fair, the male creature also continues to be called *adam* sometimes even after the woman exists, so the text does give him a partially favoured ontological status, but the verbal play is more complex than most English translations capture).

The sequence which leads to the creation of the female creature is an interesting one – God observes that it is “not good” for the *adam* to be alone. It is not clear how far, if at all, some redactor might have intended this is a deliberate contrast to all other aspects of creation being designated “good” and “very good” throughout the Genesis 1 creation account, but it is striking. Though there has not been, and still is not, an active principle of evil in this story, something has been designated “not good”, and that thing is loneliness, the lack of a relational bond.

Most of the rest of creation comes into being as an attempt to provide a companion to the *adam*, but no creature is appropriate. They are all formed out of the earth, like the *adam*, but they are not similar enough (possibly because only in the case of the *adam* has God breathed into the creature). Finally, the *adam*'s partner must be made from the *adam*'s own flesh – that is, the emphasis is not on difference, but on similarity, an emphasis made stronger by the *adam*'s response, “This at last is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.” The thrust of the text is towards the necessity of a relational bond with a peer, with one who is the same, a fellow sharer in the breath of God.

And while it is quite obviously not a text written to provide an answer of any kind to contemporary debates about human sexuality and gender, the principle that it is not good for the human creature to be alone, and that the only acceptable relational bond is one which is based on an equal sharing in the life of God, is a principle which does not require a gender binary or any theory of “complementarity”, despite how much this has been read into the text by later commentators in the Western church.

So there are now *ish* and *ishshah*, in partnership; but it is unclear how much substantial meaning this differentiation initially has. When the human couple are placed in the garden and directed to care for it, they are not assigned different tasks; nor, at this stage of this version of the story, is biological reproduction even alluded to. There is no distinction in qualities attributed to them, nor is there any indication of a hierarchy of power.

Then the rupture occurs, a taboo is violated, and the creatures themselves are changed. One of the advantages of the folk tale genre – like the parables which Jesus favoured – is that a great deal of potential meaning can be contained in a few simple symbols. Was the rupture created solely by disobedience as such? Is the act of consumption part of the nature of the transgression? Is the woman driven by curiosity, by pride, by hunger, greed, or desire? And what, after all, does it mean to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil – and why does doing so shake the nature of creation? That these questions have been answered in so many different ways, over the millenia during which this story has been told, is part of what makes it so resonant, a story we cannot give up. We recognize the rupture. We spend our time, as generations before have spent their time, trying to understand it.

The immediate consequences of the rupture, as spelled out by God in the garden, include mortality, unpleasant and difficult agricultural work, biological reproduction which is a source of pain or sorrow, exile from the garden, and from the “tree of life” within it, and gendered distinction and inequality. The two human creatures are now suddenly sharply differentiated, and assigned different labours.

And the now-man names the now-woman, Eve. This is a far more serious and significant moment than most readers of the text seem to note. Previous to this, the man has named all the subordinate creatures who are brought to him – but not the one fit to be his partner, bone of bone and flesh of flesh. Her identity, until this point, has been her own. This naming is arguably the first act of domination in the human world, one human presuming to define, to prescribe, the identity of another, and it is gendered domination. And while the name Chava/Eve means, more or less, simply “life”, the text makes it clear that the naming means that she is now to be defined by her procreative function, as “the mother of all those living.”

Before the murder of Cain, there is this – one person moving to enclose, to confine, to assert ownership of, another person's identity and being. The now-woman, now Eve, the first casualty, perhaps, of the fall, the first casualty of a gendered binary of ontology and power.

This raises interesting questions, then, with regard how we think about all of these postlapsarian phenomena. Certainly, they are all part of how we experience human life in this world. But if social differentiation based on sex or gender, biological reproduction, and relationships of gendered inequality are all described as results of the fall, this does suggest that none are to be regarded as part of the essence of human nature.

This has been, in fact, the near-universal reading of this story in the Eastern church. Going back to the doubled structure of the sentence in Genesis 1 which describes the creation of humankind (“God made humankind in his own image, male and female he made them”), and taking seriously also Galatians 3:28, the Greek Fathers proposed, and the Eastern church has continued to hold, that the original human creature was not sexually differentiated at all; that this differentiation was a sort of second step in creation, taken with a view to the impending fall (or possibly even after it); and that it did not become actively important until after the fall, when mortality required that human beings replace themselves by having children. One need not believe in the fall of humankind as a literal event within history to understand the meaning embedded in this – that both binary sex and binary gender are essentially epiphenomena, and indeed highly problematic epiphenomena, experienced as very real to us now, no doubt, but not part of the ontological truth of the human person, and founded in our alienation from God. The eschatological human person, fully realized in Christ, may well exist without gender or sexual differentiation – and certainly without the human power hierarchies constructed around sex and gender.

This could sound, and in the hands of some theologians does sound, rather thin and unappealing as a picture of humanity. Many people, whether trans or cis, have a marked experience of themselves as sexed and gendered beings, and may reasonably be put off by the idea of the redeemed human person as a sort of neuter (especially as, when carefully examined enough, this often ends up being a dilute crypto-masculinity).

On the other hand, one of the most subtle of the patristic writers, Gregory of Nyssa, creates throughout his work an image of humanity in which embodiment and sexuality are central, complex, and intrinsically part of our relationship with God and our eschatological destiny – *eros* is transformed and redirected, but preserved, in our

spiritual progress into the life of the Trinity – but in which both sex and gender seem surprisingly fluid and mutable. Gregory in his commentary on the Song of Songs writes convincingly from the perspective of a bride in the throes of passion; in his Catechetical Orations, meant to be a basic introduction to theology, he imagines Jesus the Bridegroom feeding his bride from his own breasts; in his memoir of his much-admired sister Macrina, he casually violates grammatical gender categories to situate her as a male/female authoritative teacher. His ideal vision of human relationship to God is Mary's conception of Jesus, with all of humankind thus coded female; but Mary is also his image for the nature of generation within the Trinity, placing both femaleness and maleness at the centre of the inner, triune life of God. Gender in Gregory's work is clearly a complicated matter, and for Gregory to say that the eschatological human person is not shaped by the confines of a gender binary suggests something quite different than an erasure of all difference.

I'm not intending to imply that the Eastern reading, even in its most subtle versions, is the be-all and end-all of the interpretation of gender in Genesis. I take to heart Sarah Coakley's reminder in *Powers and Submissions* (Blackwell, 2002) that the Eastern church has had more difficulty accepting women in leadership than almost any Western denomination, which suggests that the theology fails a certain sort of on-the-ground test. Nor does this particular eschatological vision fully honour the experiences of those who experience their own sexual or gender identities as deeply important on an ontological level. It is one reading of a rich and mysterious story, and not the only one; there is much more to say about how we may imagine redeemed humanity in Christ, and how the story of the garden may inform that imagination. But it is crucial to remember just how much depth of mystery we are dealing with.

Of course, it would be possible to argue that we are required, in this world, to live within the consequences of the fall; that, as fallen creatures, we are obliged to live in the binaries and the hierarchies and the inequities; in fact, this has been a frequent theme among conservative commentators who wish to preserve sex and gender binaries, and their structural hierarchies, in human society. And yet, Christian theologians have consistently maintained that, in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, the fall has been meaningfully reversed, that we have been meaningfully made a new/renewed humanity. We cannot fully live out our eschatological destiny now; but,

in this as in other areas, our practices and disciplines should be such as to root us in this new humanity, begin to form us towards it, not such as to embed us in our failure.

IV

Of course, a Christian grammar must be a grammar of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, a grammar of the body of Christ, and the very particular complications of gender which surround this body in scripture and tradition. The earliest text which tells us about the body of Christ is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. And what he tells us there is that Christ's body is a) a diverse group of people, and b) bread and wine. Right away, we are on confusing ground. Obviously, the historical body of Jesus of Nazareth underlies these transformations, but it is notable that the church produced (or at least preserved) texts which kept this unnatural body at the foreground, in advance of those texts which treat Jesus as an individual body in time.

It is, of course, absolutely essential to Christian orthodoxy that the body of Jesus of Nazareth was a real and fully human body, that he experienced birth, growth, maturation and death, felt hunger, thirst, pleasure, exhaustion, and pain, had human emotions and underwent human temptations -- although his body was one which apparently came to existence in an unconventional and theologically significant way, which hallows our physicality while calling into doubt some of our gendered social structures.

The virgin birth is the first -- though far from the last -- theological move which will raise some significant complications in how we think about Jesus's same-but-different flesh with regard to gender. For the story of the annunciation is not only a story about a young woman standing as the representative of all humanity as she assents to the incarnation of God; it is also about God taking on a human fleshly nature which derives entirely from that young woman.

It does recapitulate and reverse, in a sense, the creation of the *ishshah* from *ha'adam* in Genesis 2, male flesh coming from female as female flesh came from male -- although it is not absolutely clear that the *adam* was male in any meaningful sense before the creation of the woman. Both stories suggest an underlying ontology in which

humanness, as such, transcends sexual or gender differentiation – and certainly, the human nature taken on by Jesus, at least, cannot be ontologically sexed or gendered, or it would cast in doubt the salvation of a large part of the human race. (Admittedly, this was an active difficulty in the Anglican polity during debates about the ordination of women, and remains something of an intellectual dilemma in the Roman Catholic church, as they wrestle with the same issue.)

And yet, there has always been a lingering sense that there is something meaningful about Jesus taking his entire humanity from a woman. It made a certain sort of crude sense in terms of Aristotelian science, in which it was believed that women contributed the “blood” which formed the substance of a human body, while men contributed the spiritual essence and intelligence, the meaning-making with which our matter is imbued. It would be mischievous to invoke contemporary science, and to propose Jesus, male-identified yet without any apparent source of Y chromosomes, as a strangely transgender being. And yet, from the beginning, there has been a strong pull towards a perception of his body as somehow feminine. A body which washes, serves (the verb *diakonein* is applied, in the New Testament, exclusively to women and Jesus), spends significant time in conversation with women in contravention of social conventions, a body from which water mixed with blood issues forth in a way which brings us new life, a body which feeds the children from its own substance – there is imagery in the very scriptural text which makes the body of Jesus something quite different from a typically male body. A male-identified body -- and a male-configured body, we assume, if Luke's story of Jesus' circumcision is reliable -- yet a body drawing humanity entirely from femaleness, and enacting female roles and images, more and more so as the story reaches its most important moments. There is nothing we can say about this body which is not strange. This body, the body that embodies male Logos and female Sophia, is inescapably – let's just say it – kind of queer. (This may be most fully realized in Western later medieval mysticism, but it is by no means absent from earlier writers.)

Jesus's body was – and this is one of the clearer themes in the gospels – a transgressive body. His violations of religious codes, at least in the Synoptic versions of the story, were not primarily verbal. The words are important, but the words – even the words of the much more discursive and verbally challenging Johannine Jesus -- can only be properly interpreted in the framework of his physical activities, touching lepers, corpses

and Gentiles, being touched by inappropriate women, eating and drinking in ways seen as immoderate and impure, feeding large crowds of random strangers, driving moneychangers out of the Temple, holding children, washing feet. Some of this is, aside from other eccentricities and provocations, distinctly gender-nonconforming behaviour for a first century man. We are too distant in time to be entirely sure just how unusual much of Jesus's behaviour was, but his opponents seem to have taken exception to pretty much everything mentioned above, and John records even the disciples being surprised to find him talking to an unaccompanied woman (the fact that she was a Samaritan seems less of an issue), and deeply shocked by the footwashing, a task that would normally be performed by a slave, perhaps a female slave, and which is associated already in gospel imagery with women. It is also important to note that, in Mark and Matthew, Jesus describes his purpose in coming to the human world as an intent to *diakonein*, "serve", a word used for domestic labour, and a word which, in the gospels, is applied exclusively to women, except when Jesus applies it to himself.

But most of all, the human body of Jesus is "killable flesh." J. Kameron Carter, in his essential book *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008), reminds us that black flesh, especially black female flesh, has for most of human history been the paradigmatic killable flesh, and that in Christ's dark (and arguably feminized) flesh, which "took on the form of a slave", and suffered torture and a particularly degrading public death, we find the disclosure of the divine -- "the poverty of dark flesh is where one finds the wealthy God" (Carter, p 341). Since this essay is currently focussing on the theology of gender, and without denying the centrality of dark flesh, or the extent to which "whiteness" has warped and colonized Christian thought and practice, we may also note that queer bodies have also been, through much of human history, paradigmatically killable – trans bodies in particular. In the crucified body of Jesus, we see God's disclosure as mortal flesh, but especially as that flesh marked by the powers of society for allowable death.

The body of Jesus returns, of course, at Easter, both the same body and profoundly different – a strange body which is and is not recognizable by close friends, which eats food but also walks through closed doors; and a body with wounds. In the gospel resurrection accounts, the wounds serve primarily to stress the identity of the resurrection body with Jesus's earthly body, to affirm his physicality, and, in all

probability, to stress his ongoing solidarity with the wounded and killed of the earth. But the wound in Jesus's side was already becoming more elaborately theologized in John's account of the passion, as water and blood pour from it in a manner physically impossible for a body already dead, but figuring for us baptism, eucharist, and, crucially, also childbirth – Jesus's body continues to confound gendered imagery even in death. The resurrection body still bears this wound, and the way in which it is figured will become, especially in the late medieval period, just about the queerest thing ever in the Christian imagination, especially once it becomes linked with Christ-as-food eucharistic concepts; a suggestively-shaped, sometimes bloody, opening through which we are born, in which we shelter, which we touch and kiss, and from which we drink blood and/or milk.

This is, however, to jump forward in time, and we still have not looked at the two meanings which Paul proposes for Christ's body in the time after Easter. That Christ's body now is the church is a familiar theological concept, nearly a cliché, but it is worth at least pausing to notice that the two points which Paul is making here, in this very first attempt to explain the body, are that diversity is an essential quality, and that there should not be hierarchy within that diversity, save the single distinction between humanity and God. The body of Christ is necessarily multi-gendered, open, complex, and relational, holding a multitude of connections, identities and distinctions, within the somehow singular, yet infinitely “transposable” (to borrow Graham Ward's term) body.

The potential of this meaning becomes even more radical if we follow Gregory of Nyssa's lead in seeing the Body as made up, not only of the human bodies within the church, but of *all* human bodies, each of them made in the image of God, and that only the world's power has divided human bodies into rulers and ruled, killable flesh and those permitted to kill; only power has transformed the infinite differentiation of human bodies into relationships of overt or hidden violence, based on race, sex, gender, or any other construct.

That transposable nature of the body of Christ is even more obvious in the second meaning of the body given in Corinthians – that the body is bread and wine, that the body is sufficiently boundary-violating to be food, to be made generally available to

human persons, to be consumed, to be the body which feeds the body, a startlingly unstable presence, which is made by human intervention with some qualities of violence (crushing, grinding, breaking), which is eaten or decays, which involves the marginally unclean image of fermentation, which mingles indifferently with human bodies of all ages, genders, abilities, and identities.

A body which provides food from its own substance is almost inescapably a female-coded body. And once the language of food, of eating, has been released into human discourse about the divine, it cannot be contained. We consume the Bridegroom who is bread, and our physicality mingles with his, indifferent to our human sex or gender. The offering of wine as Christ's blood merges with the ancient belief that breastmilk was derived from the blood of the nursing body, with the milk imagery of First Peter, and with the erotic poetry of the Song of Songs and its delicate fluctuations of voice, to produce the breastfeeding Christ/Bridegroom, who is possibly first suggested in Revelation 13, where the Son of Man is described as having *mastoi*, a word elsewhere in the Septuagint only used to speak of female breasts, who returns in Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on the Song of Songs feeding his bride the church from his own breasts, and who is a familiar presence in late medieval mystical writing.

Gregory's imagery – and some of the medieval uses as well – have yet another twist. *Ekklesia*, church, is a feminine noun in Greek, and the church is frequently figured as the Bride of Christ (an identification which begins, in fact, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians). And yet, the church is also the Body of Christ the Bridegroom.

There are significant problems with this imagery, which may have taken on meanings quite different from what Jesus, in his use of bridegroom language, actually intended. But the mystics and the poets have seized this problematic image, and made it into another complex instrument for illuminating something about the unknowable God and our barely knowable selves. Bride and Bridegroom, in this pattern of imagery as in the Song of Songs, are not clearly separable figures; the male and female bodies, the divine and human identities, the human being and Christ, the lover and the beloved, flow into and out of each other. That there is, running through scripture and tradition, a consistent stream in which the Bridegroom and the Bride are in some sense the same person (there are depictions of the Wedding at Cana, too, where the pair to be married

are more or less identical), and the body's identity is unfixed as to gender and nature, in the union which has often been used, if perhaps incorrectly, to figure human union, really ought to have had a more destabilizing effect than it seems to have had up to this point.

We are brought into transformation and interconnection. We, made once from the earth as the human creature, are now made part of the body of the Son of an unnameable Father, one whose life and teachings systematically undermine the power of biological connection and social hierarchy, and who is reproduced now in perishable elements made by the subversive action of ritually unclean yeast, a body which contains, while remaining singular, all the possibilities and potentials of diverse and differentiated human bodies, and within whom all bodies are both distinct and equal; a body identified male but deriving entirely from a woman and willing to assume both male and female coding; a body which is both a bridegroom who breastfeeds, and that bridegroom's own bride, who is child and mother, killable slave and resurrected freedom, and in whom we each assume all these identities in our ever-moving spiritual growth. It is in this framework, and this framework only, that we should even try to think about the human possibilities of gender and personal relationship.

It is not accidental, nor incidental, that early anti-Christian writings frequently include accusations or implications of gender deviancy, and especially of male effeminacy. Insofar as we put on this body at our baptism, we are brought into this strange life, in which family is not a construction of genealogy but a vow of loyalty even to death, in which the sex and gender signifiers of our bodies become unstable, and a particular kind of socially resistant and yet self-offering femaleness becomes all humanity's pattern. Because we choose; and this time choose, in the face of danger, to say yes to the renewal of the world.

2. Pastoral Reflections

The Spiritual Care Needs of Transgender Persons⁴

by The Reverend Theo Robinson

Introduction

Having good spiritual health can mean different things to different people, ranging from the need to attend church services to being given the chance to take a walk outdoors. No matter what spiritual health looks like to the outside observer, to a patient in a hospital or a resident in a personal care home, maintaining a healthy spirituality is a key requirement for a speedy recovery from an illness or an easier transition into personal care.

Spiritual care has changed immensely over the last few decades, moving from a strictly religious chaplaincy to a multi-faith spiritual health focus. A reason for this shift in spiritual care is the understanding that human beings are, fundamentally, spiritual beings. Thus, spiritual care practitioners must develop an awareness of the spiritual and religious diversity that exists in the world today (Schipani, 2013).

When examining multi-faith spiritual care, a concentration is made on the history, rituals, and theology of the various world religions. The purpose of this information is to provide a background to the spiritual care practitioner before going into a visit with a patient or resident. For example, one would not want to discuss the Christian belief of being saved by the death of Jesus on the cross to a person who is Jewish. As well, it is good to be knowledgeable of the history between the Christian Church and the Indigenous People of Canada in order to be prepared for the possibility of a negative reaction to anything regarding church or God. Overall, it is respectful to

⁴ This article was originally published in *Multifaith Perspectives in Spiritual & Religious Care*, a publication of the Canadian Multifaith Federation, Edited by Dr. Mohamed Taher, 2020, pp 243-249

the person in front of you to have an understanding of their beliefs, faith, religious rituals, or anything else that can have a positive impact on their spiritual health.

One aspect of spiritual care that has come to the forefront in recent years is that of spiritual health regarding gender and sexuality, specifically those who identify as transgender. The goal of this chapter is to help educate spiritual care practitioners in the differences between gender, sex, and sexuality, provide some history as to the struggles faced by the transgender community, and to offer some suggestions as to how this group of people can be better cared for spiritually.

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

While they are often used interchangeably, gender, sex, and sexuality are three words with quite different meanings. It is important that these differences are understood and the words used in their proper contexts.

Sex is the term used for the label assigned at birth and refers to the biological differences between males and females. For example, internal and external genitalia, as well as the level of hormones found in the body, are different for males and females. There are also genetic differences, with males having 46 chromosomes that include both X and Y and females having 46 chromosomes containing only X. The male/female split is often seen as binary, but many believe that sex should be considered as more of a spectrum rather than two mutually exclusive categories (Newman, 2018).

Once sex is assigned, we tend to assume gender. Gender, however, goes well beyond reproductive organs to include a person's perception, understanding, and experience of themselves. According to the World Health Organization, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. What a society considers to be female, for example, is based on such things as beliefs and values, not physical attributes. That women are supposed to wear dresses and that boys do not cry are, ultimately, made-up social customs and conventions.

Gender is a person's inner sense about who they are, their personal sense of being a man or a woman, and what role they are to play in society. This is commonly known as gender identity. If someone's gender identity aligns with their biological sex, then they are considered to be cisgender. However, one's gender identity and sex as assigned at birth do not always line up. For example, while someone may be born with female reproductive organs and be classified as a female at birth, their gender identity may be male. If a person is experiencing a misalignment of sex and gender, they are considered to be transgender and often have feelings of gender dysphoria, a condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex.

Some people may decide to act on these feelings, undergoing hormone replacement therapy, having one or more surgical procedures performed on their body, or simply by living their life as the gender that they feel best represents them.

Sexuality is often confused with both sex and gender. However, it is really a stand-alone term in the sense that no matter a person's assigned sex at birth or their gender identity and/or expression, their sexuality, or sexual preference tends to remain relatively constant.

Human sexuality is the way people experience and express themselves sexually. This involves biological, erotic, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual feelings and behaviors. Simply put, if men and women are attracted to each other, they are considered to be straight and if men are attracted to men and women attracted to women, they are gay. When someone realizes that they are transgender and decide to live their life authentically, people assume that sexuality changes alongside any physical changes. However, that is not usually the case. If a female, attracted to males, transitions to male, their sexual preference will likely remain male. As with gender, sexuality is often seen as a spectrum, rather than a dichotomy. The struggle comes when society attempts to put labels on a person's sexuality. In the example above, a straight woman has transitioned into a gay man. On the surface, it seems that their sexuality has changed, but, in reality, their sexual preference is the same. Be aware that this is a simplified description of sexuality. The fluidity of a human being's attraction to

one another cannot be dismissed. People often explore their gender identity and their sexuality simultaneously.

Society's conflation of sex, gender, and sexuality has created interference in a person's ability to understand and express their individual identity. Starting at infancy, a child is bombarded with what society believes to be the norm for that baby's assigned gender. Baby girl rooms are painted pink, baby boys are given toy cars, and the list goes on. Despite the fact that gender diversity has existed around the world and throughout history, today's society has forced a narrowly defined and rigidly enforced gender dichotomy. Girls who act and dress more masculine are assumed to be lesbian and boys who act and dress more feminine are assumed to be gay. However, how someone acts and dresses is an indication of gender identity and expression, not of sexuality.

All of this can be summed up in one word – heteronormative. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of heteronormative is the "attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality." Over time, society has deemed that cisgender people in opposite-gender relationships is the standard that we should all live by, and that the male and female gender roles that have been established are undeniable. When someone talks about a "normal family", they mean a father who works and a mother who stays home to cook and clean and to take care of the two children. It is this type of family that has been labelled as standard. These societal assumptions are seen everywhere from the cinema to social media, and especially in religious circles. These assumptions are also very harmful to the LGBT* community, especially to those who are transgender, as it makes one feel like they do not belong in what society deems to be acceptable.

Individuals who live outside of cultural norms face numerous challenges including disownment from family, discrimination in school, at work, and in public spaces, and even violence. As a society, we need to have a better understanding of these three terms – sex, gender, sexuality – so that we can be considerate of each person's unique expression of self and create more inclusion for people who live on the spectrum, rather than in the binary.

It is important for spiritual care practitioners to be aware of these terms and their misuse within society. People have experienced severe trauma in their lives due to living outside of cultural gender norms, often being ridiculed, beaten, rejected by friends and family, fired from work, and many other cruelties. Religious zealots are claiming that God has rejected them because their lives go against biblical teachings. The end result is often tragic, with people finding ways to rid themselves of the harassment by self-harm, attempting suicide, and successful death by suicide. By being aware of these tragic occurrences, spiritual care practitioners can be better prepared for what trauma might come up during conversation.

Discovering I am Transgender

When parents find out they are pregnant, one of the questions they have is wondering what will be the sex of the baby. Once they have that information, they start gathering supposedly gender appropriate items such as the right paint color, the right color and style of clothes, and the right toys. Society has pre-determined for the parents what their child should play with and what color they should wear. A child learns at an early age who they are supposed to be, how they are supposed to dress, and how they are supposed to act. Again, all of this is based on sex assigned at birth, not on what the child prefers.

So what happens when a girl decides that she no longer wants to wear dresses, or when a boy asks for dolls at Christmas?

Children as young as four can recognize that they are not comfortable in their bodies. However, because parents are placing societal norms on their child, these youngsters are forced to hide who they truly are or want to be, or if they are exposed, then tactics are sometimes used to make the child conform. A life like that is not an easy one, and can often be quite traumatic.

A journey of self-discovery can take many paths while a person explores their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Some people will tell you that they knew who they were from the age of three. Others, like myself, take a life-time to figure out who they really are. Here is my story.

As a young girl, I was made to wear dresses and play with dolls. At the same time, most of my friends were boys and I played a lot of sports. I also preferred to play cops and robbers and play with Matchbox™ cars than play house or make up dance routines. I could tell fairly early on that I was different from the other girls my age. Looking back, it seems that I just did not have the vocabulary to explain the differences.

During my teenage years, without being fully aware of what I was doing, I began playing with my gender expression. I almost always wore jeans and a t-shirt, and I begged my parents to let me cut my hair short. I did not care about looking pretty, refusing to shave my legs until peer pressure got the better of me in junior high school. When puberty hit, I was devastated. I wanted nothing to do with breasts or periods, I did not like how high my voice was, and I was always really jealous of the boys being able to stand and pee anywhere they wanted (came in handy during hide-and-seek).

Not knowing any differently, I assumed that all kids went through these feelings of self-hate and always being uncomfortable with their appearance. But I was often teased and bullied about how I chose to dress, told that I was ugly, and even called gay. I had a lot of trouble making friends, and in the end, it made me a really angry person. I battled with these feelings throughout my teenage years, never letting on to anyone how far my thoughts would go. While I participated in a lot of team and group activities, I felt extreme loneliness that tore away at my self-confidence and put me into a really dark place.

As I approached 20 and was sorting through all of these thoughts, trying to figure out who I was, a realization came to me late one night while watching the original *Ellen* sitcom. During the episodes leading up to the one where Ellen DeGeneres' character comes out as a lesbian, I noticed patterns that seemed to mirror some of my life experiences. Thinking back on my teenage years, I thought about people on whom I had crushes and to whom I had been attracted. Nine times out of ten, those people were women. It was as if a light bulb had gone off in my head! I was a lesbian!

Suddenly, life made a little more sense, but I was terrified. What was I going to do about this? I could not let my parents find out. They would hate me! So I explored

my discovery in quiet. I snuck to the gay and lesbian section of the bookstore to try and buy books without anyone seeing me. I stole into lesbian bars to be with others like me but also hoping not to be discovered. When I did start dating, I was too scared to hold hands with them in public, I did not tell my parents anything about my girlfriend until my mom caught us kissing, and I assumed that I would be hated and rejected in every facet of my life. I spent many years being scared of who I was because of society's general hatred of the LGBT* community. While discovering the truth about a piece of your life is supposed to build confidence back up after having lost it, I actually felt even worse about myself. I spent the majority of my twenties in despair, fear, and self-pity. I began to drink heavily and smoke pot. I often contemplated things like jumping out a window or crashing my car. My preferred state of being was one of numbness. As a result, I do not have many memories from that decade.

Throughout that time, I did not find comfort in calling myself a lesbian. While I met others who wore that label proudly, it never felt quite right when I used the title on myself. The comfort in my body that I thought would come with uncovering a piece of myself never came. Again, without having the terminology for what I was experiencing, I knew that my brain and my body were incongruent. For example, when I spoke, I would be surprised at the sound of my voice, especially if I heard a recording of it. In my head, I had a nice deep voice but, in actuality, my voice was quite a bit higher pitched than I imagined. As well, I would picture what I look like in certain clothes, but when I would put them on, all I saw were curves that I felt should not be there. The strongest feeling I had was the urge to stand to pee. I tried for years to teach myself to do so, but to no avail.

I spent years fighting within myself, not knowing why I never felt confident in my skin. My self-confidence plummeted and my self-hatred skyrocketed. I even spent a period of time swinging to complete feminine side, make-up and high heels included, trying to live how society said I should be living as a woman. It was a very destructive way to exist. I hated everything about being a woman. I often imagined my body without breasts and felt absolute elation in those daydreams. There were many male attributes that I wished I had, often praying that I would wake up the next day with the right body parts and in the right body. That never happened, of course, but these feelings caused me much anguish.

I met a wonderful woman who allowed me to explore these feelings in many ways, including a lot of discussion around my emotions and physical discords, and introducing me to a friend of hers who had begun medically transitioning to a man. As with the episode of *Ellen*, there was a moment where suddenly everything became very clear. I was not a lesbian...I was a man! Ultimately, all of those feelings of mismatch between my brain and my body, all of that self-hatred of everything related to my womanhood, it all began to make sense. And while I could never say the words "I am a lesbian" out loud, I was very much able to say "I am transgender".

Being Transgender

Picture in your mind's eye what your body looks like without any clothes. Now imagine looking in a mirror and seeing the opposite of what your mind is telling you should be reflected back at you. That is, simply-stated, gender dysphoria – a conflict between a person's physical attributes and the gender with which that person identifies. According to the American Psychiatric Association,

"[G]ender conflict affects people in different ways. It can change the way a person wants to express their gender and can influence behavior, dress and self-image. Some people may cross-dress, some may want to socially transition, others may want to medically transition with sex-change surgery and/or hormone treatment. Socially transitioning primarily involves transitioning into the affirmed gender's pronouns and bathrooms."

Gender dysphoria can exist in many forms. For some, taking a shower causes them to have anxiety attacks so severe that they wear clothes, or keep the lights off, to hide their physical attributes, even from their own eyes. For others, the need to have facial hair is so dire that they are willing to use mascara to draw a beard and mustache on to their face. There is no single type of gender dysphoria and each is as valid as the next. Each can also be as devastating as the next.

If a transgender male still has their female reproductive system, then they will continue to require pelvic exams. Some people hate that part of their body so much that they do not let anyone touch them there, even doctors. Having to have such an exam can be very traumatic. The same situation applies for a person who has yet to have their breasts removed, or top surgery. As exciting as it is to finally have a surgical consult to have a very important process done to move your body closer to the form you feel it should be, knowing that your breasts will be handled during the appointment can be devastating to some.

Even something as simple as donating blood can cause dysphoria. At the moment, the regulations with the Canadian Blood Services states that even if a person is on hormones and have their name and gender marker changed on all legal documents, they must remain in the system as their gender assigned at birth until they have had gender reassignment surgery. For a person battling gender dysphoria, it can be traumatic to see the wrong gender assigned to their file, even if it is out of their control.

As many variations of dysphoria that exists, there are also varying degrees of how that dysphoria affects the person experiencing it. As well, that degree could, and usually does, change over time. For example, when I first begun my exploration of being transgender and what that meant for me, I did not feel very much dysphoria. Yes, I disliked certain parts of my body, but it was not crippling for me. It did not stop me from going outside, or taking a shower, or living my life in general. However, as I started to take steps in order to live as my authentic self, I became more dysphoric about my chest. As I tried hard to pass as male, my chest became a burden because it was a dead giveaway that I was not physically male.

While my dysphoria was not as great as others, it was a turning point at which I was able to make some decisions on how I was going to proceed with my transition. And there are a lot of decisions to be made once a person realizes they are transgender such as whether or not to undergo hormone replacement therapy, to have surgery, to be open, to be stealth, or just to bury the feelings deep inside. No matter the decision, it is a personal one and it is a long, hard road with a multitude of anxieties and fears found at each step. Let's talk about a few of these topics.

There are essentially two ways of transitioning – medically and socially. Some decide to do the former and some the latter. Others start with social transition and then move into medical procedures. To socially transition, a person would dress, act, behave, and portray themselves as the gender to which they identify. This often includes a change of name and gender pronouns. For myself, I used social transition as an initial step, as a way of exploring how it felt to be seen as male, and to ease the people around me into accepting my male identity. In some countries, it is necessary to have fully socially transitioned and lived as your true gender for a number of years before you are allowed to seek medical interventions.

For a vast number of people, socially transitioning is as far as they will be able to or choose to go in their transition. In Canada, we are privileged to have provincial health care systems that support people who wish to medically transition, making a majority of the medical procedures to be publically funded. (For a list of publically funded transition-related medical care in Canada, please visit <https://www.cdnaids.ca/publicly-funded-transition-related-medical-care-in-canada/>.) As well, numerous insurance plans in Canada cover some or all of the cost of hormones, such as testosterone and estrogen. However, in other countries, the costs of hormones and of medical treatments, including doctors and psychiatrists, have to be paid by the patient and can cost thousands upon thousands of dollars. Having to foot high medical bills often stops people from doing any sort of medical transition, which can cause mental and emotional hardships. There are those who spend years saving money and doing crowd-funding so that they can get hormone replacement therapy, which is a lifetime commitment. If a person is able to undergo hormone replacement therapy, they will experience many physical changes. Each person will react to their treatment differently, with some changes happening quickly and others over many years. For someone who finally begins and then has to stop because they are unable to pay for their next refill, it can be devastating. While some changes will not reverse, many do, which can send that person into a depressive state.

Another medical process that a transgender person will contemplate is having gender reassignment surgery. There are several options for surgical reassignment including, but not limited to, breast removal or augmentation, hysterectomy, and genital reconstruction. Each person will be unique in what changes they desire to make

to their body. These surgeries can be very expensive, ranging from \$4,000 to \$50,000, not including hospital stays and any complications that arise. Most Canadian provinces cover the cost of gender reassignment surgery. However, money is not the only barrier that transgender people face when considering surgery. There are relatively few surgeons who are knowledgeable in gender reassignment surgery. As an example, in Canada, while surgeons who will perform mastectomies, breast augmentations, and hysterectomies are fairly common, all those who desire genital reconstruction must currently go to Montreal, Quebec.

Medical procedures aside, no matter how a person decides to go about transitioning, one of the hardest decisions to make, in my opinion, is the choice between living in the open or living stealth.

Living stealth in the transgender community means to live as one's correct gender without reference to gender assigned at birth. The reasons for going stealth are many and are as individual as the person who is making the decision. In its purest form, being stealth means completely hiding one's transgender history, not talking about it with anyone, and completely hiding that one has transitioned. Deciding to live stealth is done all too often to avoid physical danger and murder. However, it is also done as a fresh start. Transgender people frequently lose people they love, their faith communities, and even their employment. By moving away and starting again living stealth, that person is seen only as the gender they portray and can work on building new relationships. However, it also means living in constant fear that someone will find out, or that someone from your previous life will show up and "out" you to your new friends or new employer. It would be like continuously walking on eggshells, perhaps trying too hard to act the right way and say the right things. On top of which, you would always have to be careful to never bring up anything, or carefully edit everything, about your past.

Living completely in the open is not necessarily the easier path to choose. If one is truly consistently out as transgender that would mean always correcting people when they make the assumption that one is cisgender. Making these corrections would become quite an effort the more a person develops the features of their identified gender, the more a person "passes". It is a difficult line to walk as the goal of taking

hormones and having surgery is to become physically the correct gender and, therefore, success is achieved once one stops being misgendered. And yet, to be fully out as transgender would result in always negating one's success as passing as the correct gender.

As with gender and sexuality, living authentically becomes a spectrum, with most transgender people living their lives somewhere between stealth and completely open. I am lucky enough to pass as male 100% of the time and do not go out of my way to correct strangers from male to transgender male. Personally, I do not have an issue discussing my past as a woman, and am completely open about my transition and willing to answer any questions. When I apply for jobs, I am completely honest because I want to make sure my workplace will be safe for my family. I am also a public advocate to bring normalcy to the transgender community in general, and specifically within the Church.

As with deciding whether or not to socially and/or medically transition, how each person decides live as stealth, not stealth, or somewhere in between is very much an individual decision. The important takeaway from this discussion is that one should never assuming anything about the person in front of you. While it is not normal practice at the moment, the best approach is to ask someone you meet which pronouns they prefer. By doing so, you eliminate any guesswork with regards to gender and gender identity. As well, you will immediately gain some trust from that person, if it turns out the person with whom you are speaking happens to be transgender. Using correct gender pronouns is not only a sign of respect, but it also reduces depression symptoms, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts (Russell, 2018).

Assumptions and Being an Ally

There are many assumptions about people who identify as transgender, the most typical being that it is a phase and that it will pass. While there are certainly some thoughts about whether or not "being trans" is becoming a fad, it is a dangerous line to cross into assuming that anyone talking about transitioning is doing so to be popular. As with any other non-heteronormative situation, being transgender is not a choice. To believe that someone would chose to risk being chastised, bullied, discriminated

against, and possibly killed is absurd. Regardless, it is a common assumption and not the only one, either. There has been fearmongering within the public sector that people who claim to be transgender, specifically men claiming to be transgender women, are only doing so in order to get into the female washrooms so that they can attack and sexually assault women. Rest assured that this is not the case and it is important to never invalidate a person's expression of questioning their gender identity.

As a spiritual care worker, it is important to not make any assumptions and to become a better ally towards transgender people so that you can create a line of communication and of trust with that person. Here are some tips that can be used to help create a safe space for transgender people.

You cannot tell if someone is transgender just by looking because many transgender people do not appear "visibly trans," and transgender people do not look any certain way. You cannot look around a room and pick out who is transgender, just as you cannot see that someone is gay simply by looking at them. You should assume that there may be transgender people at any gathering and it is quite likely that you have met someone who is transgender, even if you are not aware of the fact.

As discussed previously, never make assumptions about a transgender person's, or anyone else's, sexual orientation. Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about to whom we are attracted, while gender identity is about our own personal sense of being a man or a woman, or outside that gender binary. Transgender people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, or anything else on the spectrum. While the label might change post-transition, the gender to which a person is attracted does not change once they identify as transgender. Meaning that if a person assigned female at birth is attracted to women, when they transition to male they remain attracted to women. It is only the label that changes from lesbian to heterosexual. Remember that both gender and sexuality are fluid. In similar fashion, it would be extremely inappropriate for you to ask a person about the appearance or status of their genitals, no matter if they cisgender or transgender. Never ask if a transgender person has had "the surgery". If a transgender person wants to talk to you about such matters, they will bring it up. Similarly, it would not be appropriate to ask a cisgender person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to

transgender people. Ultimately, it really does not matter the person's sexuality as that knowledge, or lack thereof, should not influence how you care for that person spiritually.

It is important to understand the differences between coming out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and coming out as transgender. Coming out to other people as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or any other sexuality is seen as revealing a truth that allows other people to know your authentic self. Some people find empowerment in defining their sexuality as it tends to allow them to find a group of similar people with whom they can find support and belonging. Although coming out publically with your sexuality can be a frightening step, the LGB community places great importance and value on the idea of being out in order to be happy and whole. When a transgender person has transitioned and is living their life as their authentic self – that is their truth. The world now sees them as who they truly are. For those of us who choose to declare being transgender publically, it can be considered a “second coming out”, which might be even more difficult than coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Unfortunately, it can often feel disempowering for a transgender person to disclose to other people that they are transgender. Sometimes when other people learn a person is transgender, they are seen as a liar, or a fad-follower or attention-seeker, or are simply told they are wrong and that they do not know what it is they are talking about. It has been surprising to me how cultures seem to be increasingly more accepting of the differing sexualities, but as soon as you bring up being transgender, people turn to shame, anger, and hate. Some people may choose to publicly discuss their gender history in an effort to raise awareness and make cultural change, but never assume that it is necessary for a transgender person to disclose that they are transgender in order to feel happy and whole. In some areas of the world, it can be quite dangerous to be discovered as transgender, which is one reason why it feels as though being transgender is quite rare. It is more likely that people are simply keeping the information to themselves for both their physical and mental health.

It is extremely rude to ask a transgender person their "real name". By using the term “real name”, you are invalidating their chosen name, which is in fact their real name. As well, for some transgender people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is a part of their life they wish to leave behind.

Respect the name a transgender person is currently using. If you happen to know the name someone was given at birth but no longer uses, do not refer to it or share it without the person's explicit permission.

At the same time, respect the person's gender identity by being aware of their pronouns and the terminology they use to describe their identity. Transgender people use many different terms to describe their experiences. Respect the term (transgender, transsexual, non-binary, genderqueer, etc.) a person uses to describe themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity label fits them best, give them the time to figure it out for themselves and do not tell them which term you think they should use. If you are unsure which pronoun a person uses, listen first to the pronouns other people use when referring to them. Someone who knows the person well will probably use the correct pronouns. If you must ask which pronoun the person uses, start with your own. For example, "Hi, I'm Theo and I use the pronouns he and him. What about you?" Then use that person's pronoun and encourage others to do so. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun, apologize quickly and sincerely, then move on. The bigger deal you make out of the situation, the more uncomfortable it is for everyone. Most transgender people understand that mistakes happen and would welcome the correction as it tells them that you are trying to respect them in the best way you know how. Trouble arises when people use improper labels and pronouns maliciously, purposefully trying to hurt the person in front of them.

There is no right way to transition. A transgender person's identity is not dependent on medical procedures or their physicality. Accept that if someone tells you they are transgender, they are. Not everyone has the monetary means, mental capacities, or support systems to undergo hormone treatments and surgeries. Some who realize their transgender identity later in life, and perhaps have a spouse and kids, may choose not to transition because of concerns over losing their family. This becomes an important consideration especially if the spouse will have conflicting feelings around their sexual identity – being labelled as gay or straight when the opposite was true before their partner's transition. No matter what a person chooses to do about their gender identity, if they declare themselves to be transgender, then they are transgender. No one has the right to say otherwise.

In the end, the best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to transgender people speaking for themselves. Talk to transgender people in your community. Check out books, films, YouTube channels, and trans blogs to find out more about transgender people and the issues people within the community face. And know your own limits as an ally. There is nothing wrong with admitting when you do not know something. It is better to admit your ignorance than to make assumptions or say something that may be incorrect or hurtful. Seek out the appropriate resources that will help you learn more. Remember, being an ally is a sustained and persistent pattern of action; not an idle or stable noun.

Transgender Spiritual Care

While spiritual care should simply be human care, there are situations that may come up in a discussion with a transgender person that may not exist for others, even within the LGB community.

Many transgender people experience verbal threats and physical abuse, are turned down for a job due to being transgender, are ridiculed privately and publically, and generally feel unsafe in public places, especially washrooms and gyms. Many are also rejected by their family, their friends, and their faith communities. With all of these stressors, there is an increase in mental health concerns, including considering and attempting suicide. Something as simple as using a person's chosen name and proper pronouns can produce a significant reduction in depression symptoms, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts (Russell, 2018).

Positively using name and pronoun is considered to be gender affirmation, which "refers to an interpersonal, interactive process whereby a person receives social recognition and support for gender identity and expression" (Bockting, 2016). The search for gender affirmation is the goal of many transgender people and is often ultimately achieved through hormone treatment and surgery. However, the access to such treatments is limited. In Canada, while health care programs are generous with getting people access to hormones, there is a lack of surgeons willing or able to do gender affirming surgeries. In the United States, it is costly to purchase testosterone and

estrogen, and the process to get a prescription can be long and filled with many obstacles such as obtaining letters from psychologists to whom one must attempt to prove they are transgender. In the meantime, those waiting for medical treatments will be doing their best to pass as their chosen gender through clothing and mannerisms, all the while living scared that they will be discovered. It is not a great quality of life.

The inner turmoil that comes with identifying as transgender is also a cause for concern. A large portion of the transgender community have experienced a dislike for their body, whether in part or in whole. People have voiced to me their desire to go to sleep one night and wake up the next day with the proper body parts. The result tends to lean towards a self-hatred of the body and a huge decrease in self-confidence. For some, the depression that is associated with gender dysphoria can lead to various forms of self-harm such as drinking, drugs, cutting, or any number of methods of self-mutilation. Levels of anxiety are apt to be high causing some people to not be able to be naked in any form, including the shower, or to go out into public.

Hating one's body parts can also result in a lack of desire for medical attention, which can lead to complications. For example, if one is assigned female at birth and has such a disgust for their body or reproductive system that they refuse to allow anyone to see them or touch them, sexually or otherwise, there is a high chance that they will avoid getting regular medical care such as a pap smear or a breast exam. The same could be said for one assigned male at birth who avoids getting a prostate exam for similar reasons as previously mentioned. Avoiding regular medical care for the anatomy currently present is dangerous, but having to deal with the anxiety to go with having the exams can be crippling.

Being religious and transgender is also a difficult path. Anyone in the LGBT* community has historically been rejected by the church, being told that they are not accepted as they are, that it is an abomination against God to want to change one's body, and that God only loves heterosexuals. Experiencing rejection by the church does not make a transgender person any less spiritual; it is more likely that they have decided to explore their spirituality in different ways than attending religious services. There is a longing for many transgender people to find affirming and inclusive faith communities to which they can belong, especially if they have lost their friends and

family along the way to self-discovery. That is not to say that everyone is looking for religion. Spiritual care personnel should tread carefully when exploring a transgender person's beliefs as their reaction may be one to assume you are trying to "cure" them.

Conclusion

The most important take away from this chapter is that when you are having a spiritual care encounter with someone you know to be, or suspect to be, transgender, remember that they are no different than any other person you will encounter that day. They want to be cared for with respect and dignity, and they deserve to be heard. Make no assumptions about the person before you, taking the time to let them reveal the details they wish to provide. Be respectful by asking their preferred name and pronouns. Be aware that their road to who they are today may have been extremely rocky and it is likely that they will start the relationship in distrust. By showing them compassion, empathy, and respect, you will be able to gain their trust and show that you are someone with whom they can confide.

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