

# **Anglicans and Transgender: The Church of England in the context of widespread gender confusion.**

A series of reflections by Andrew Symes, published on the Anglican Mainstream website 'Editorial Blog' pages, 2015-2018

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# Trans equality in Blackburn: a new doctrine of humanity?

*May 26, 2015*

I'm always a bit nervous when my phone rings and a message appears "no caller ID". Usually it's a sales rep asking if the Anglican Mainstream HR manager might be interested in a new payroll system for our hundreds of employees, or if we want to switch our energy supplier. Just occasionally it might be something more sinister. Like a Guardian journalist. And so I was contacted by Karen McVeigh for my opinion on a story which had just broken: Blackburn Diocesan Synod's passing of a motion to approve liturgies to mark and celebrate someone's 'gender transition'. As I hadn't heard about this before I should perhaps have said "no comment", pleading ignorance, but Karen was politely persistent and I wondered whether an alternative point of view would be given at all if I said nothing. So I made some comments very much in defensive mode which can be read in her article [here](#).

Conservatives have been on the back foot trying to respond to the sexual revolution and nowhere more so than over the transgender question. Since the Guardian article I have heard from a Synod member from Blackburn Diocese, who says that the motion came from Lancaster and Morecambe Deanery. During the debate at Diocesan Synod, speaker after speaker used the currency of love, compassion for the hurting, acceptance and welcome for all, and my informant comments: "It appears that we're expected to base our views on how people feel, rather than what God has said."

Bishop Julian Henderson is a conservative evangelical who spoke and voted against the motion which was overwhelmingly carried; Chris Newlands, the vicar who brought the motion, has reason to be unhappy with the appointment of Bishop Julian because of differences in personal lifestyle and theological outlook, and it's possible that the motion was brought forward as an ambush to cause maximum discomfort to the Bishop. The motion will now also have the effect of testing the LGBT-affirming credentials of candidates up for election to the new General Synod later in the year.

Newlands was interviewed on the BBC early morning Sunday programme (without anyone giving an alternative view). He reiterated his concerns given to the Guardian reporter – that transgender people experience high levels of bullying and discrimination, and said that, though this new service being advocated would not be a “re-baptism”, it would be more of a re-naming. God, who made the person one gender physically, now needs to be re-introduced to that person who has changed gender and has a new name and identity.

Well known maverick clergyman and social commentator Giles Fraser as usual has not lost the opportunity to attack orthodox Christian faith in his [“Loose Canon” column](#). To give him credit, he is doing theology in the public square, and suffers abuse from atheists who can’t understand why he persists with the God thing. But his defence of the Blackburn motion contains some serious flaws. Firstly, he says

*“If God has called us all by name, it would be good if He got the name right.”*

The implication is that God is a bit behind the times; he hasn’t realised that the person he formerly knew as Sue is now Harry, and God needs to be informed in case he makes one of the worst of modern faux pas – referring to a transgendered person by their former name and gender. Fraser goes on to say *Indeed, as Deuteronomy insists: “Women must not wear men’s clothes, and men must not wear women’s clothes. Everyone who does such things is detestable to the Lord your God”...And I’m happy to call it nonsense, because that’s effectively what Isaiah does too.*

Fraser contrasts the “conservative evangelical” author of Deuteronomy, concerned about sexual morality and boundaries between genders, with the “progressive” Isaiah who was clearly, well, an 8<sup>th</sup> century bc Giles Fraser. This is because Isaiah looks forward to a day when eunuchs, previously excluded from the assembly of God’s people, would one day be included. Fraser applauds this as an example of the Bible arguing with itself, and of the progressive view winning out. But Giles, Jesus did not think the Bible was internally inconsistent. He did not come to abolish the law as you claim Isaiah has done. He regarded Deuteronomy and Isaiah as equally authoritative, and saw himself and his ministry as the fulfilment of their teaching, rather than deciding on a line to take and picking out the bits he could get to confirm it.

And the vision of the prophets, that one day those previously excluded – gentiles, eunuchs – would be included, does not come about because God changes his mind on sexual morality and gender flexibility like some celestial Conservative

MP. Its because while Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Jesus are in complete agreement about the seriousness of sin and the wonder of grace, the death and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God removes the necessary but temporary visible barriers established by God in the Old Covenant to illustrate these truths.

A lot more theological and pastoral work needs to be done on the issue of transgenderism by orthodox Christians, (for example along the lines of this helpful piece [here](#)). “Gender dysphoria” is a [recognised medical condition](#) where increasingly, adults and even children are being set on a course to attempt to change the physical characteristics, hormonal make-up, clothing etc to align with the gender that the person feels he or she is. But however painful the process of feeling “trapped in the wrong body” and however keenly felt, the church cannot just unquestioningly affirm and celebrate before God what appears to be an expression of radical individual choice resulting from a disorder, rather than something good.

Fraser is right that the name, personality and identity of each person is important to God, but turning to Christ involves accepting and embracing who we are as God has made us, including our biological gender, and bringing ourselves under the easy yoke in humble submission, not seeking to be someone different and to be recognised and named as such. This seems to be based on profound dissatisfaction what God has made – can that be right? – and undermines historic biblical doctrines of creation and of humanity. Because of this it will cause further rifts between the Church of England and its Anglican partners in other parts of the world.

Those who voted for an official liturgy to celebrate an act of ‘gender transition’ in Blackburn Diocese apparently included some evangelicals. In previous generations, key theological battles were fought over Christology and especially the doctrine of salvation and the atonement. Increasingly today it is anthropology that is the battleground: some Christians seem to be enthusiastically affirming the saving death and bodily resurrection of Christ, while at the same time embracing a doctrine of humanity that is foreign to the Bible. For the sake of ‘mission’, compassion, and the right to sit at the high table, church leaders are deciding that a Christian understanding of male and female and the human personality can be quietly done away with.

# Calling colours by their real names

*September 29 2015*

As little Johnny stood in the crowd, holding tight to his mother's hand, waiting for the emperor to arrive, he reflected on how confusing things were nowadays. When he had started in reception at Primary School, he had gone over the names of the colours with the other children. The houses that they painted were simple: a square box with windows and a door, green grass, blue sky, yellow sun.

But then things changed in his second year. The teachers started talking about people who saw things differently. For them, grass is blue and the sky is green and the sun is black. Even though Johnny and his classmates had never met anyone who believed this, they were told solemnly never to make fun of such people. In fact even though some children got bullied mercilessly for having ginger hair, unfashionable trainers or being slightly overweight, the teachers seemed to ignore that, but were always on the look out for comments about colour awareness.

In the third year it changed again. The teachers got them to do interesting things in class. First, they pointed to the colour which Johnny had always known was blue, and as a group they intoned "green". They learned to call colours by words which they had always applied to other colours. And then they were told to paint pictures with blue grass, green sky and black sun, except they were still to call the colours by their original names. This, the school principal said, was all part of "diversity".

Johnny noticed that all around him people were talking about the different colours. On TV, presenters would call colours by their wrong names – at least he thought they were, but then the presenters would laugh and say there was no right and wrong when it came to the names of colours.

On Sundays Johnny went to church with his parents and his little sister. They didn't always have a Sunday school but Johnny found it interesting to sit with his parents and listen to the sermon. On one occasion the preacher referred to the story of the feeding of the 5000. "It says in the text that the grass that the people sat on was green", he said, "but of course the writers at that time were very primitive and didn't have our level of understanding. We know that the grass may well have been blue. As a church we have too often failed to listen with compassion to the views of people with diverse colour awareness. We must repent and become more inclusive. Our casual use of colour designation can cause real pain to some people."

His family moved to a different church after that.

And now here they were waiting for the emperor to arrive. They had all been told that he would be wearing a special suit and robe of red and yellow, and a song had been composed:

*Our emperor, our valiant king  
Peace and prosperity you bring  
Red and yellow, yellow and red  
We fly our flag, by you we are led.*

Many people had arrived holding red and yellow flags. But they had all been confiscated, and replaced with black and white ones. Announcements over the speaker system up and down the streets explained: we are celebrating diversity! When the Emperor comes, please hold your red and yellow flags high and sing the song together!

Twitter nearly crashed as millions of people around the country watching on TV joined with the crowds on the streets to send in pictures of a black and white flag with the hashtag "red and yellow".

"But mum", said Johnny, "these flags are black and white". His mother was appalled as people standing around them looked frowning at Johnny. "Shhh" she

said. At that point the music started up, and the song rang out through the streets. The cavalcade with the Emperor at the centre made its way slowly along, as people cheered, waved their flags, sang and shouted the song. Johnny was too small to see what colour suit the emperor was really wearing. Did it matter?

In the sermon that Sunday, the Vicar did refer to the issue of colour. “In this place we still refer to the colours by their traditional names”, he said, “and that may sometimes make us feel uncomfortable in the world outside. But it’s not our business to criticize those who have different views, even less to try to change them as if we could return to a golden age. We just want to talk about God and his love!”

Johnny had limited experience and understanding, but he knew that he was living in a world of adults most of whom had taken leave of reality, and those who hadn’t, even those who believed in God, were just passively compliant. What could he do? He was just a little boy. At school the next day, he and two of his friends decided that they would start a secret society called “real colour”.

# Harvest: reminder of reality

*Oct 20, 2015*

I grew up on a farm. I never showed much aptitude or interest for agriculture as a child, preferring to hit a ball, strum a guitar or read a book than drive a tractor or dig a row of potatoes. But recently, much to my family's amusement, I have been showing signs of my roots – the hidden “man of the land” is showing through as I hog the privilege of mowing the lawn, and in the pleasure I take in making a crumble with apples from our own tree, or this year, fritters from our carefully nurtured courgette plant.

Whether or not we have gardening tendencies, many of us will have attended, or even been involved in leading, Harvest Services in our churches over the past few weeks. Preparing these can be great fun: selecting a mixture of old and new, the familiar rousing hymns with perhaps a new song or two; what Bible passages to choose, what points to make in the talk? If it's a family service, there'll be a need for visual aids, perhaps some sort of group activity, and of course the collecting of donated produce for the local foodbank.

There are often initial doubts about how to make the Harvest theme relevant to predominantly urban audiences who have lost touch with the land. Should we spiritualize, and talk about mission and evangelism (church planting and growth; the parable of the sower, “the harvest is plentiful...”) Or should we make the focus all about feeding the world's hungry people? There is certainly plenty of material in the Bible and from various relief and development agencies to help with this. But each year we find that we needn't have worried. Even if most of the people present have little consciousness of farming, a Sunday harvest celebration, with flowers, produce, tins, packs of pasta and kids' artistic offerings just always seems to be a joyful occasion.

Why is this? Could it be that it taps into something ancient, something which reinforces and celebrates the real world at its most basic, and who we are as human beings living in response to it, like a child's baptism or a wedding?



Those who celebrate the end of the season for gathering in of produce, exhausted but satisfied from hard physical work from which they earn their living, are now few in our population. But many of us do some gardening; all of us eat. There is a strong unbreakable connection between us and the land. Miraculously, year after year, plants yield their edible nutrition to sustain our bodies. The complex life form of our living flesh, created by God, is sustained daily by the energy-producing fruit of plants which comes from the earth. The amazing ecosystem of seed in the ground, growth and harvest according to seasons, ensures the surviving and thriving of an even more extraordinary creation, the human being, living in community, male and female self-replicating through the generations. If as Jesus taught, we combine the physical eating of bread with the feeding on and putting into practice the word of God, while being branches on the fruitful Vine, then we are fully alive.

Harvest, then, reminds us not just that “all good gifts around us are sent from heaven above”, though that is true, and leads to thanksgiving and generosity. It also reminds us of the astonishing skill of the creator, which is so obvious that as Paul says in Romans 1, those who cannot or refuse to see it can only replace worship of the Creator with idolatry and ultimately a narcissistic focus on self. But also, the celebration of the harvest cycle, of our dependence on the ancient, unchanging, divinely ordained system for food, health and reproduction, reminds us especially in a context of environmental and moral breakdown, that we ignore or attempt to change at our peril the physical, biological and chemical realities which we inhabit.

We are not called to return to some kind of romanticized rural idyll. The Bible story begins in a garden, and ends in a heavenly city. God loves cities, because that’s where most people live now, and a perfect version of ‘urban’ is where those who know him now are headed. But the danger of all earthly cities, since Babel and Sodom, is human hubris. We lose touch with what Harvest teaches about the nature of the physical world and our utter dependence on God; we elevate ourselves, we lose touch with true humanity and create in our minds what we think is a better, alternative one. The result is judgement, being “given over” to our sinful desires – resulting in a sense of entitlement instead of thanksgiving and generosity, environmental damage, alienation from one another. And, the detachment of the brave new world of our minds from the reality of our created bodies, which is part of the philosophy behind the sex and gender confusion in the West.

“No thanks I’ve got a different way of obtaining food” would be a foolish way of responding to Harvest, just as “I’ll find my own way to God” is the wrong response to Easter. God has put the systems in place so we can, with thanks, live within them.

[This piece was also published in Church of England Newspaper].

# ‘Gender-fluid’ – God’s purpose in creation?

*Jun 23, 2016*

The ancient and wonderful song of worship “Te Deum laudamus” is so called because of the first words in Latin meaning “we praise you God”. It contains in the BCP translation an unusual phrase celebrating Jesus’ humanity: “thou didst not abhor the virgin’s womb”.

Why this curious phrase to convey the incarnation? At the time when the Te Deum was written, a fierce controversy raged around how to understand the real nature of Jesus. Many thinkers, influenced by Greek philosophy, believed that things of the earth are clumsy, dirty, and destined to decay. In particular while the human body can attain a near perfect form of sorts, it often does not! It comes into being through a messy process; it gets old and falls apart, whereas the mind and particularly the soul are more pure, perhaps immortal, apparently more spiritual.

Those influenced by this thinking believed that if the Lord Jesus was really God, he cannot have lived on earth with a human body. The Te Deum, like the Nicene Creed, countered this, insisting on the clear biblical teaching with its roots in Jewish thought, that human beings are not pure essence of person trapped temporarily in an unimportant casing, but we are a unit of body, mind and spirit, created by God in his image. Jesus did not appear on earth a fully-formed man-lookalike, but as a real baby boy born of a woman; later, he really died. His physical body was a vital part of his identity, and our salvation.

At conception each one of us are assigned a body that is either male or female<sup>1</sup>. God made this ‘binary’ world for several reasons. First, so that humanity can ‘fill the earth’ through reproduction. Second, so that human society can be organized

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<sup>1</sup> [\[1\]](#) [Various forms of ‘intersex’ conditions, or ‘disorders of sex development’, whereby physical features of the genitalia may not correspond with the chromosomal male or female identity of the individual, exist as a result of imbalances of hormones and proteins in the womb. [See here for more details.](#) These conditions are extremely rare (approx .00001% of the population); their existence does not negate the fundamental teaching of Genesis 1 and 2 and should not be confused with transgenderism or transexualism.]

and enriched by the non-sexual, social interaction of male and female contributing according to different temperaments, gifts and roles. Third, so that something extraordinary should occur by the union of two individuals who are differently gendered – not just for sex and possibly a child, but a lifelong close partnership with the ‘other one’ which is the basis for security and harmony in family and community. This union of difference mirrors the union of God and the believer, and ultimately God and his creation. “God made them male and female...for this reason...” (Mark 10:6-7).

The church has often been accused of separating physical from spiritual, and viewing the body and sex as shameful. If this has been true in some cases, it is because of a failure to follow its own Scriptures – just as slavery, apartheid and the Inquisition were not caused by the Christian faith but by the Church’s abandonment of its key ethical principles, and following the norms of surrounding culture. Some sections of the church are now in danger of doing the same thing in embracing the ideas of the sexual revolution, thinking they are promoting love and freedom while in fact they are going back to old pagan ideas about the world that the Gospel was given to liberate us from.

Nothing illustrates these ideas more than so-called ‘gender theory’, popularized by philosophers such as Judith Butler. For her, the system of two sexes and normative heterosexuality is a prison, reinforced by society. Instead, according to Butler’s powerful idea gaining traction today, gender has nothing to do with physical characteristics, but is purely in the mind /human spirit, and once people grasp this, there can be a liberating multiplication of gender identities and sexual orientations. In fact, (the theory goes), society must reject the ‘dictatorship of nature’, the created physical sex of a person which ‘restricts’ the choice of who they want to be, so that they can be free to create themselves.

It is not difficult to see where this has led us. There have always been individuals with some kind of ‘gender dysphoria’, needing sensitive therapy, and pastoral care, hopefully through the church. But today, more and more people are identifying as ‘transgender’ or ‘gender-fluid’. This is not because society has become more wise, loving and tolerant. Nor are the debates about who can use which toilets merely reflecting American politics. Rather, we have all been tutored in an ancient, now resurgent occultic idea that the physical body is unimportant and can be rejected, and our mind/spirit is what matters and

indeed is... 'god', our own creator. And when John becomes Jane and all are forced to turn a blind eye to physical reality, we exchange truth and freedom for lies.

Does the Church still believe the words of the Te Deum, and affirm that just as Christ did not recoil from created physical reality but embraced it, so should we? Can we find ways to deal compassionately with individuals caught up in a web of deceit, while strongly opposing ideas taking hold in the culture which reject God and install self as one's own creator and redeemer?

# Transgender: pastoral and prophetic responses

*Oct 25, 2016*

Two stories.

Our thinking about sex and gender is being shaped, not by philosophical discussions, descriptions of a way of thinking, abstract point-by-point reasoning. Rather, we're being presented with stories about people, whether it's fictional characters on a soap opera who we come to admire and identify with, or real individuals, like the woman I heard being interviewed on the radio some weeks ago.

Megan<sup>2</sup>, from Brighton, was talking about Alice, her daughter. Alice was born with male accoutrements and so was originally, 'mistakenly', called "Adam", but as she grew up she showed a preference for a female persona. "When she said she wanted to be a girl, I was delighted", gushes Megan, "and we're now beginning the process of transitioning, so eventually Alice's body conforms more to who she really is. I know the risks: she'll have a higher chance of mental health problems later, but that's because of stigma in society against trans people".

The interviewer asks gently: "and how are friends and family responding?"

"Everyone is completely supportive. We've had so many 'likes' on social media. In the school, Alice is Alice, she plays with the girls and uses their toilets, and all the children are being taught that we are all free to be who we want to be. A couple of parents did question it but I'm glad to say they've been firmly put in their place and told that bigotry will not be tolerated".

A story closer to home has reached the national media this week. A fourteen year old girl has decided she's a boy. Her parents will not let her begin the process of transition, believing that they are responsible for her welfare, and that their daughter has been influenced in this direction by others including a social worker. The girl has complained to the local authority, who are backing her wishes against those of the parents, and are threatening to take the girl away from her family so she can be free to pursue the search for her gender identity. The parents, we are told,

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<sup>2</sup> The names in this section have been changed; the story is as I heard it.

are committed Christians, and are being supported in their [legal case by Christian Legal Centre](#).

There are several important questions that need to be asked when confronted with the new social reality that has nurtured the transgender phenomenon. Depending on our personality, our life experience, our understanding of Christian faith, some questions may resonate more than others:

- how should I, and the Church, respond to transgender people?
- What does the Bible say about sex and gender, and about suffering, sin and salvation?
- What does 'gender theory' (the idea that our gender identity is in our mind, not our body) mean for all of us when it is promoted in society and enforced in law?
- Where has this new thinking come from?
- What will happen to freedom to believe and practice orthodox Christian faith in the West?
- What should we do?

#### Two books

Two recent books explore some of the questions in more detail. Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Ebbe's Church, Oxford, takes on the issue of Transgender as part of the new 'Talking Points' series from the [Good Book Company](#). His main concerns are summarized by the first two questions on the above list. Some people suffer from 'gender dysphoria'; the science is unclear why; these are suffering individuals coping with interior stresses rather than actively representing an agenda or ideology. They are not just people 'out there' like the media stories at the start of this piece. Adam/Alice may be in our church or our workplace or family.

Christians should not respond with disgust, "yuk", but nor can we simply endorse with a "yes" the worldview of someone who has rejected their body's sex and is creating a new gender identity. Vaughan then takes the reader through an overview of biblical theology of personhood from creation to revelation. Sin has brought about sickness and disorder; human thinking is corrupted (there is a clear exposition of Romans 1:18ff), but the good news is about God's rescue plan through Christ. Unlike contemporary thinking which locates me as the centre of the universe, and authenticity coming from affirming my desires, Scripture tells us that Jesus is the hero and the centre, my identity comes from union with him, and by conforming my desires to God's will.

While Vaughan's book does mention the need for some Christians to contend for public truth in these areas, the main emphasis of the book is pastoral and

evangelistic. By contrast, Writer Daniel Moody is more interested in the impact on all of society when a man legally takes the identity of a woman, and vice versa.

Daniel's book uses simple analogies to explain and deconstruct what is going on. If the law declares that a man (physically) is in fact a woman because he feels a woman (mentally), then reality has been changed for all of us. The law now recognizes me as a man, not because of my physical sex, but because that's who I have declared myself to be. If taken to an extreme, if transgender is normal, then using the physical body to determine identity is taken away, and all we are left with to define humanity and navigate reality is mind, and words with changed meanings. Hence the title of Daniel's book '[The Flesh made Word](#)', alluding to a reversal of the Gospel message.

Daniel's book has a unique style and subject matter that is not always easy to read. I found myself skipping over bits I didn't quite follow or even disagreed with, but then would find passages that stopped me short, startling me with the implications of what is happening in society. Apart from the title there is almost nothing explicitly Christian in the book except at the very end (for that reason Christians who want to find reasoning that does not only depend on Scripture may find it helpful). The 'hiding' of the physical body in the new doctrine of gender, is compared to Adam and Eve hiding from God in the garden. Finding ourselves as human beings requires looking at God again.

#### Two responses

In today's environment Christians are finding it harder to hold together the personal and the philosophical, the evangelistic and the prophetic. Is a transgendered person just an individual going through psychological anguish? Or is he/she also a symptom of a wider problem, what Isaiah describes in 59:14: "justice is driven back...truth has stumbled in the streets. Honesty cannot enter." When the fear of hurting the feelings of an individual prevent the church from warning about a lie which is changing the basic understanding of reality of more and more people, is that 'compassion', or avoidance of spiritual conflict with contemporary 'strongholds'? It may be that some Christians have a particular calling to focus on evangelism and pastoral care within churches, but this cannot be seen as the only valid Christian response to Transgender, as if the stumbling of truth in the streets is not our concern. To speak prophetically to society about wrong thinking, and to care compassionately for individuals caught up in it, is not a contradiction, but two vital aspects of the church's ministry.



# Transgender liturgies? Why are we even asking the question?

*May 16, 2017*

If a destructive, anti-Christian, revolutionary ideology is taking over society and even sections of the church, how should it be effectively countered? Whose responsibility is it to do so? Should Christians address the ideology itself and its dangers to society, or should they focus on its symptoms and effects, as encountered in people in churches? Is it counter productive to talk negatively about cultural trends at all, and should Christians instead seek to simply tell ‘a better story’ in a positive way? Will it be enough in terms of being salt and light in Western culture, for theologians to write books and essays for an audience of educated conservative Christians, by carefully and graciously explaining biblical truth and pointing out error?

Martin Davie has certainly carried out this latter task very well in his latest piece of work, [a Latimer Monograph](#) which goes beyond the title’s brief of merely answering the question “Should the Church of England develop liturgical materials to mark gender transition?” to address the subject of transgenderism much more comprehensively. In the book he outlines the arguments of the pro-transgender apologists, refutes them graciously but firmly and in detail, and provides a clear and up to date re-statement of the biblical doctrine of humanity as male and female, grounded in the creation narratives through to the teaching of Jesus and the promise of the new creation. He addresses the question of pastoral care in the church for people who present as transgender, stressing, of course, the need for welcome and compassion to individuals, but also not being afraid to talk about underlying problems connected with the Fall: disorder, sin, rebellion, and the need for repentance, faith and a new start in Christ.

Davie writes with his customary clarity and logic, and does not fall into the trap catching some theologians, of being so keen to be fair to opposing arguments that they end up sitting on the fence or being overly complex and nuanced. As an

introduction to the topic, and as a handbook for clergy, those involved in pastoral care and interested lay people, this book has to be highly recommended.

Returning to the questions we asked at the beginning, we might say that Davie has more than fulfilled the task given to him, and it's not his job to do more than help orthodox Christians, and particularly Anglicans, take a stand on a clear biblical position on sex and gender identity as the church begins to debate the issue alongside that of sexual relationships. 'Transgender Liturgies' certainly hints at philosophical and even political currents affecting wider society that oppose the orthodox Christian worldview. Davie quotes (p40-47) from online articles which suggests a sinister change in the way new sex and gender theories are being taught as facts in schools, 'transitioning' is being encouraged, and information about the mental health consequences are being suppressed. He gives space to the [major 2016 study by Meyer and McHugh](#) published in the New Atlantis, casting doubt on all claims of a biological basis for gender dysphoria.

Davie uses these points to strengthen his case against the arguments of those proposing changes in the Church's teaching and liturgy. He does not explore the implications of what they mean for society as a whole, how they illustrate the power and reach of the 'sexual revolution' (for example he doesn't mention that the New Atlantis study mentioned above [has resulted in the authors being vilified](#)), or what the origins and main aims of this revolution are. That may not be his brief – but where are other senior Anglican leaders carrying out this prophetic task of cultural critique?

One way of doing this, perhaps, would be to ask a different question. In addition to: 'Should the Church develop liturgical materials to mark gender transition?', it would be good to ask 'why are people in the Church even asking this question?' Specifically, what changes have happened in wider society which have meant that the historic Christian position outlined by Martin Davie, though true and clearly presented, is simply dismissed and rejected by increasing numbers of people? Given the [recent incidents involving politicians and LGBT 'orthodoxy'](#), is it possible any more for anyone holding public office to oppose the 'popular' view? These questions force us to look beyond theological debates and policies within the church, to the way people are thinking in the culture, and its implications not just for the church but for the world as a whole.

So while it's important to get clear in our minds how the church might care for transgender people from a biblical and pastoral perspective, it's surely right to go further than this; to be concerned about the ideology of 'gender in the mind' and the rejection of binary male/female norms that is being promoted in the media and education, and is slipping into law. For example, what are the implications if, as is being proposed, people can be legally recognized as a different sex simply by filling in a form? How can we support those who speak out against the sex and gender revolution in public? Should we take more seriously in our intercession the dark and demonic aspects of this idolatry which is keeping people in bondage, and is part of a package of secular and neo-gnostic thought which, as it takes hold in peoples' minds, will make the preaching of the Gospel more difficult? Can we more effectively form counter-cultural Christian communities of rebels against this new 'empire', drawing especially on young people, some of whom see through the lies and deceit and bullying of LGBT ideology?

Many people in our culture have either completely rejected biblical Christianity and embraced a new vision of what it means to be human, or they have attempted to synthesise this new vision with aspects of Christianity. The phenomenon of transgender and the distressing and painful experiences of 'trans' people are merely a symptom of a wholesale conversion to this vision, in the same way as the presence of churches and Christians and biblical principals embedded in laws and customs is a result of earlier generations being converted to whole life discipleship.

One of the features of this new vision is the determination of those who follow it to enforce it with soft and hard power: providing teacher training and books in schools, portraying heroic transgender characters in TV soap operas, and getting churches to adopt transitioning liturgies is one way; bringing the force of the law against teachers who won't use this material, or people who refuse to bake cakes, or who deny 'trans women' entry to toilets, is another.

So thank you, Martin Davie, for an excellent book – please can it be followed up by “Part 2” – perhaps entitled: “Transgender Liturgies: what they tell us about the sexual revolution, its threat to our society and the Church in the West, and what we can do about it”?

# C of E's new gender policy backs up 'heresy' claim

*Nov 14, 2017*

In late 2013, there were a number of reports in the media about failures in RE in schools leaving many children ignorant about the basic facts of the Christian faith. In November of that year, a senior Bishop speaking at General Synod celebrated the high academic standards and good OFSTED reports of many C of E schools, but said that children are not being educated fully unless they are cared for pastorally and “begin to explore a relationship with Jesus Christ” (see [here](#), p106). This commitment to enabling children to have a foundational exposure to the Gospel through schools for which the Church has responsibility was reiterated the following year by the Archbishop of York.

But this seems to have changed. It's true that at local level, many C of E schools have good relationships with local churches, and ensure that the Bible is opened and children learn what orthodox Christianity is as part of their education, in assemblies and RE classes. However, increasingly, this cannot be guaranteed. Sometimes C of E schools appoint Principals who are experienced heads but with no personal faith or even who are antagonistic towards Christianity.

Other schools face lobbying from groups of parents who object to favourable and clear portrayals of Christianity. Recently [a primary school in Tunbridge Wells capitulated to such pressure](#), agreeing to stop assemblies provided by the Christian Youth ministry Crossteach. The Diocese of Rochester, rather than insisting that parents accept the Christian element of the curriculum because it is a church school, backed the head in implementing a dumbed-down faith and religion policy in which the distinctive elements of the Gospel are removed to avoid 'offense'.

The Diocese of Oxford has just brought out a Guidance Paper on Chaplaincy in Church Schools (not yet on its website). Surely here there should be some reference to the Archbishop of York's call for children to know Jesus Christ in the role of a chaplain? But no – the 17 page document does not mention Christ or the Bible. It specifically warns against any kind of 'proselytisation' in the activities of the chaplain. It describes mission in the following terms:

“The concept of Missio Dei – God’s Mission – recognizes God is at work in the world, seeking to bring life in all its fullness (e.g. reconciliation, good relationships, wholeness and human flourishing).”

It suggests that some of the spiritual ministry of the chaplain could include “creation of opportunities to reflect upon and consider life choices and behaviours”, and to “support faith development”:

“This extends even to ‘faith in no faith’, it cannot be said that some adherents of atheist humanism or secularism do not show great faith in their endeavours.”

This is a document supposedly encouraging Church schools to consider appointing chaplains, and encouraging clergy, or youth workers, to apply for such roles. But because it will be read by secular government education officials, any genuine Christian element is not just watered down – it has been excised completely. One has to ask, if this is the price of being allowed to continue to manage schools, what is the point of pouring resources and expertise into the church schools structure? And what has happened to enabling children to know Jesus?

The Church of England’s complete capitulation to a secular government agenda was on show to the nation on the morning of Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November. Astonished viewers and listeners all over the country choked on their breakfast as the C of E’s chief education officer explained the [new policy to accommodate ‘transgender’ children](#). (More media reports and comment [can be found here](#)).

As the Anglican Mainstream website has pointed out repeatedly, schools already have robust anti-bullying policies, and already work hard to instill a culture of civility. They already teach children not to pick on those are different, whether it’s the tiny percentage of cross-dressing children who may have gender dysphoria, or the much more numerous minorities: those with ginger hair, those who are racially different, with glasses, slightly overweight, who have an unfashionable bag or shoes, etc. But this new directive from the C of E, trumpeted with a big media launch, appears to be based on the belief that some children can be identified as ‘gay’ or ‘trans’ from an early age; that if a girl wears a batman cloak or a boy wears a tiara this is to be celebrated and encouraged as part of the new exciting world of gender fluidity.

The leadership of the C of E claims that nothing has changed in terms of its doctrine, how it understands the Christian faith. That this new directive on

affirming 'trans' children is simply a pastoral response to young people in distress. But according to the new guidelines, when a little boy comes to school wearing a dress and wanting to be called Alice, not only must other children all call him 'Alice' with love and welcome, with severe punishments for not complying, but all children, parents and staff must believe that this is in fact not a boy, but a trans girl, and that such gender fluidity is normal and good. Archbishop Justin Welby repeats his assertion made in the February Synod 'radical inclusion' speech, that there are no 'issues or problems', only young people loved by God. And according to the report, the imposition of gender ideology in schools is not a problem or an issue – we just need to love children and obey the new government regulations.

At a stroke, it seems, the Archbishop and the senior leadership of the Church of England have crossed out the biblical doctrine that “male and female he made them”, that the church’s mission is to introduce people to Jesus Christ so they can turn away from sin and be reconciled to God, and oppose evil and injustice. Rather, according to the new Stonewall-assisted directive, it’s all about enabling children to ‘discover who they really are’. The Gospel is reduced to “love, joy and the celebration of our humanity without exception or exclusion.” The C of E leadership have embraced a radical neo-gnostic ideology and then denied that there is such a thing; they have bought into the idea that worldviews which disagree with gender fluidity, for example biblical Christianity, are harmful and must be ‘stamped out’.

It’s not just the Christian social conservatives, the people most despised by the metropolitan elites of Lambeth palace and Church House, who think this is barmy. Increasingly, people in the secular world, including a growing number of feminists and others on the left, are very concerned about the rush to embrace the ideology of transgender, allowing extremist lobby groups to push through policies in health, education and law which have not been properly thought through. Shrill voices speak of the mental health problems caused by ‘transphobia’, but now more sane voices are daring to speak out about the permanent damage being done to teenagers who think that the drastic surgery of sex change can alleviate their mental distress, only to find that it becomes much worse.

So in trying desperately to be ahead of the curve in rejoicing in the Emperor’s new clothes and making this compulsory in their schools, the Church of England

leadership is not just wrong, it could find itself embarrassingly out of date, backing an ideology which many secular people regard as reckless and irresponsible.

With unfortunate timing on its part, the C of E launched its new gender fluid policy just after the [resignation of Lorna Ashworth](#) from General Synod and Archbishops' Council. The well-respected conservative evangelical had warned of the policy of 'good disagreement' being a front for a slide into heresy. This was brushed off on Friday as a complete exaggeration by Bishops, and also by many evangelical clergy on social media. She does not need to say anything more. The headlines on Monday morning about 'Valuing all God's Children' have proved her point.

What can be done? Many faithful clergy and lay people are governors at their local C of E schools. Will they simply apply the new guidelines uncritically, or will some quietly refuse to comply? Will there be passive acceptance, or protests and resignations? Will fear lead to silence and compliance, or will some follow Lorna's lead?

# Synod debates about liturgy open up bigger questions of truth and religious freedom

*Feb 6, 2018*

If the Church of England approves prayers to celebrate and affirm gender transition and / or same sex relationships, does it matter? Some would say it doesn't, as long as individual parishes are not compelled to use such prayers. Some churches long ago stopped using most formal liturgies anyway, so perhaps the question is irrelevant. But others would say such prayers are very important. For the LGBT activist, specific prayers are necessary to publicly validate identity and experience in the setting of the church; "to actually name us and our reality", as [Christina Beardsley says](#) about 'trans' people.

Theologian Martin Davie agrees with the LGBT activists about the importance of officially sanctioned liturgies in the C of E and how they express truth: what we all believe. [In his recent essay](#) he revisits the theme of '*lex orandi, lex credendi*', meaning that what the church believes and what it prays must be aligned. Davie points out that unlike some other Protestant denominations, Anglicanism defines its system of belief not just on a statement (the Thirty Nine Articles), but also a series of prayers and rubrics (the BCP and the Ordinal). But of course Davie argues strongly against the adoption of the proposed new liturgies, precisely because they would imply that the church believes something different to what it has always believed. While some may claim that such prayers in church would only be a minor local expression of pastoral care for individuals, in fact LGBT activists know very well that they would be a symbol of a radical change in how the church understands itself and reality.

The Anglican formularies are derived from an accepted understanding of Christian faith based on Scripture, and prayers that we say reflect that. It's not the case, as some have claimed, that prayers develop according to our evolving experience and understanding of God, and then we get our theology from these



prayers (Davie cites the Anglican Church of Canada as having embraced this erroneous idea). Rather, Article 20 is quite clear:

*'The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written.'*

In other words, Scripture comes before liturgy and controls its content. Considering the question of prayers of affirmation for same sex couples, Davie concludes that the only way this could be done with integrity is if the C of E repudiates all its existing teaching on sex and marriage in the Canons and Prayer Books, and says it no longer believes in the teaching of Scripture as historically understood. As it wouldn't do this, what we would have is incoherence, where the church officially contradicts itself, for example by allowing prayers that celebrate same sex unions as the 'Hereford Motion' urges, while not contradicting the theology of the BCP marriage service.

But what about liturgies for gender transition? Davie is not impressed by the Episcopal sleight of hand, by which [they did not recommend a new liturgy but have given permission for clergy to use an existing reaffirmation of baptismal vows service.](#)

Regardless of the wording, the Bishops have in fact declared it is "an acceptable part of Christian discipleship for someone with male biology to identify themselves as female and vice versa"(Davie). While the Church has not sufficiently grappled with the recent phenomenon of transgender, and hasn't produced any teaching which the new services may or may not align with, what is clear is that a biblical theology of creation and the nature of humanity is contradicted by the Bishops' guidance. Prayers which celebrate someone's 'gender transition' are not just a local expression of love and welcome for an individual – they articulate a new, non-Christian understanding of reality which is why the LGBT activists were so keen for the Bishops to go even further.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the new rhetoric of gender which is illogical, but also compelling. On one hand, we are told (for example in Beardsley's article, and in the 'Radical Inclusion' speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury last February) that there is no ideology or agenda, just individuals with a profound personal conviction about their identity, who need to be welcomed with love and not shunned by the church. On the other hand, we are

all expected simply to accept that a 'trans person' is not just identifying as a gender different from his/her biological sex, but that he/she is different on a profound ontological level. A 'trans' person according to this account, does not just feel 'trapped in the wrong body'; rather he/she is a variant kind of human being, has been created as such, and has come to discover this previously hidden truth about gender and personhood *which we all need to discover*.

This is certainly an ideology. As [Ryan Anderson explains, this is “a metaphysical claim”](#). It is in fact a religious claim, a manifestation of a faith. And it seems that the leadership of the Church of England are determined to avoid the necessary theological analysis of this faith. In accepting the concept of 'trans children' in the anti-bullying guidance issued to schools last November, and in speaking in official Synodical documents about 'trans' people's journey to find their true identity somehow being equivalent to the Christian journey, the Bishops have gone further than advocating compassion for people with gender dysphoria – they have accepted aspects of the new Gnostic faith of gender fluidity, incorporated it uncritically into their understanding of Christian faith, and expected all Anglicans to simply go along with it.

But what about the responses with which we began this exploration – those who don't use liturgy anyway, and those who think new liturgies don't matter as long as they're not compulsory?

Firstly, all churches use liturgy, and perhaps the most easily recognizable is the informal type used by worship leaders in charismatic churches. I'm not criticizing that style of worship at all – I've participated in it myself as a musician and worship leader. But the words used between songs to encourage devotion and worship, and the songs themselves, often develop a form that is repeated week by week. To what theology is it tethered? That's another long discussion, but the point is that what a church believes is shown in its liturgy, formal and written or informal and spoken/sung, for good or ill. You can't avoid *lex orandi lex credendi* just because you don't use the Prayer Book.

Secondly, because the debate about LGBT liturgies is not just about compassion for individuals but about the nature of the Gospel, truth and justice for all, for many activists, once the Church has agreed to such liturgies, they and the worldview they illustrate should be mandatory. [Jayne Ozanne argues](#) that in the secular world, once “equality” laws have been passed, there should be no

exemptions, for example for Christian bakers who object to icing a message on a cake supporting same sex marriage. Presumably she and others who think the same way would also insist that the same principle of “just love” (her phrase) should apply in the Church of England – that once Synod has approved services blessing a gay couple, or someone’s new gender identity, those prayers reflect what we now believe about reality, and the principle of “just love” should make this compulsory across the board.

What appeared at first to be a minor issue of pastoral provision for a small minority of individuals has quickly become first a theological crisis in the church, then a threat to religious freedom. Do enough faithful leaders in the church understand this, and can they turn the situation around?

# Pastoral care for transgender people: does it require acceptance of LGBT ideology?

*Apr 17, 2018*

Mark Yarhouse has built a reputation as a sound and trustworthy guide in the field of gender confusion. As a Professor of Psychology at a respected [American University with a strong evangelical heritage](#) he is frequently quoted with approval by evangelical commentators as someone who combines Christian faith, scientific expertise, pastoral compassion and winsomeness. In 2015 he published a book 'Understanding gender dysphoria: navigating transgender issues in a changing culture'. Now a much more concise treatment of the subject has arrived. Written in collaboration with one of his doctoral students, Julia Sadusky, 'Approaching Gender Dysphoria' has been published by Grove booklets. This [received publicity recently in the Church of England Newspaper](#), who chose to use a direct quotation from the booklet in their headline: Transgender people 'reflect God in a unique way'.

Really? I had just read an [article](#) by another eminent medical doctor, Michael Laidlaw, detailing the terrible consequences of hormone therapy and surgical 'transition' treatments, and warning about the lies of the new gender ideology now being overtly preached to children in schools. For Laidlaw, gender dysphoria is a potentially life-threatening mental illness, not something to be celebrated because it helps us understand and experience the divine. Can these two Christians, both experts in a similar field, be talking about the same thing? I ordered Yarhouse's Grove booklet to find out.

Some children and adults experience gender dysphoria (GD). Yarhouse/Sadusky and Laidlaw agree that this is a distressing psychological condition for which those individuals who suffer deserve to be treated with compassion and respect. But while Laidlaw sees the condition as harmful, requiring therapy for

alleviation and recovery of alignment between biological sex and self-perceived gender, Yarhouse is careful not to pass such value judgments.

The first chapter clarifies terms that are used. The second summarises the main approaches to GD in children. The solution advocated by Laidlaw (helping the child accept his or her biological sex) has now “come under fire”, Yarhouse says, because some transgender adults complain that this was tried on them when they were young; it failed and was ‘harmful’. So today, professionals either advocate “watchful waiting”, or are keen to intervene in medically facilitating cross-gender identity. The booklet gives examples of these interventions briefly, again without offering any value judgment.

The booklet’s third chapter attempts to clarify the complicated world of gender identity, by separating out three main strands: personal identity (those struggling with gender dysphoria, sometimes in a painful and private way), those happily adopting a public gender-fluid identity which may or may not combine with alternative sexualities or involve physical transition, and those whose transgender identity becomes more explicitly public and political. These three groups of people need “their own unique response from a thoughtful and engaged Christian community”, say Yarhouse and his co-author.

As they unpack this with a series of examples, the authors emphasise the need for Christians to show empathy, and practice listening and journeying with the transgender person, avoiding expressing shock, disapproval or rejection. In one example, a wife discovers her husband trying on her dresses, and the impression given is that somehow the wife is at fault for not being more understanding. In another case, the focus is entirely on the “angst and confusion” felt by 13 year old Kevin who wants to be a girl, and on an insensitive comment by a Bible study group leader, not on the pain felt by his mother.

In terms of Christian ministry responses, Yarhouse and Sadusky distinguish between a ‘posture’ taken up by the minister (for example, a bible-based conviction about gender), and a ‘gesture’ (practical ways of relating). Yarhouse says that having too inflexible a posture can limit ministry. Not calling someone by their preferred name or pronoun out of principle will be interpreted as hostility. The aim must be to journey with an individual, honouring and validating them, not to tell them they’re wrong. Transgender young people are

watching to see if they will be accepted and loved by Christians. Jesus reached out to the “marginalized and forgotten” and so should we.

But then, according to Yarhouse, Christians should be open to the idea that even ministry to trans people with compassion and understanding is not enough – in fact it is patronizing. Rather, it may be that God is being glorified in the story of the trans person, so the cisgendered Christian is actually the person being ministered to. “Wisdom and spiritual fruit” can emerge from such journeying alongside a trans person.

Overall, it has to be said, this booklet is strong on the need for Christians to be compassionate towards people with gender dysphoria and willing to learn from the phenomenon of transgender, but is unreliable in terms of helping Christians navigate the issue from a biblical perspective.

Briefly, here are some serious problems with this booklet from a conservative Christian perspective:

a) The authors appear to be saying that the problem with GD is not the misalignment of physical reality with inner psyche, or the potential mental and physical damage that come from transitioning. Rather it is the pain that trans people feel from not being accepted. Nowhere in the booklet does it say that there is anything inherently wrong with transition medication and surgery.

b) There is no mention of the possibility or desirability of change or cure for people with GD, for example through counselling, except in the negative way that this is what the trans person’s parents or Christian interlocutors would want.

c) There is a brief mention of the huge cultural push to persuade us all that gender is not related to physical sex but is in the mind, and to celebrate trans identities and ideology, but no critique is offered.

d) There is no mention of how increasingly, in certain environments (eg schools), pressure is being applied for all to accept trans dogma. The booklet ends up hinting that the conservative biblical perspective is the problem, and needs to be changed in order to allow trans people to feel comfortable with people of faith. In this, the booklet appears to align with LGBT activists.

e) The authors accept that Jesus was able to balance a conservative bible-based posture with compassionate pastoral gesture, but they don't go on to apply this to us today. Rather, they say, taking a firm position against gender ideology is inherently inflexible and prevents empathetic journeying.

f) The conclusion strongly suggests the idea that truth is to be found, not in biblical principles, but in humbly walking alongside someone with a very different perspective to me. God is at work, according to the authors, not as Christians resist the transgender ideology and graciously help people suffering with GD back to gender wholeness, but as they listen to and learn from trans people.

Of course, all authentic Christian ministry needs sensitivity and care, but the aim is alignment with God's purposes for the one who has (even unintentionally) departed from them. In saying that it's conservative Christians who need to change not the gender-fluid, Yarhouse and Sadusky are echoing familiar LGBT rhetoric.

I was very interested to see, on exploring the [Regent University website](#), that their qualifications in psychology are accredited by the liberal American Psychological Association. That explains the line that the authors take. Hopefully those who trust Professor Yarhouse as the most authoritative and reliable guide in this area will use more discernment in future.

# IFTCC launched as so-called liberal society closes off some choices and enforces others

*Oct 16, 2018*

An audience in London heard on Monday how a small group of activists have succeeded in spreading a new cult across the Western world, corrupting principles of scientific research, and in particular have threatened the integrity of medical understanding and practice. Doctors are now living in fear, either hoping that the issue won't come their way, or in some cases going against their conscience and known medical facts to carry out harmful procedures because of intimidation and threat to their livelihood.

What has happened? The ideology of 'gender' holds that how a person feels about their gender identity is much more important and real than their physical, biological sex. So the condition previously known as gender dysphoria, whereby someone is uncomfortable or distressed by conforming their identity to their biological sex, should, according to the new orthodoxy, always be diagnosed as an irrefutable sign that the person is 'trans', living in the wrong body, and so the body must be altered to conform to the person's self-perceived gender.

Dr Quentin van Meter is an American endocrinologist who during his early training saw at first hand the work of the notorious and disgraced psychologist [John Money](#). At the conference launching the [International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice](#), Van Meter explained how Money, like Kinsey before him, was fascinated by the sexuality of children, and carried out ethically dubious research into the statistically rare but distressing cases of intersex conditions. It was men such as this who saw the need to bring these ancient pagan ideas about gender and sexuality from the fringes of literature and philosophy into the mainstream of science and particularly, medical practice. 40 years later their disciples have revived and popularized their ideas today, with the World Professional Association for Transgender



Health now dominating the discourse, using bullying tactics to promote the trans ideology in academia and suppress more sensible, rigorous science such as the [research of McHugh](#) and more recently, [Littman](#).

Transgender clinics are now flourishing. In the US, childrens' hospitals are now routinely rated in terms of quality of care as to the extent of their affirmation of the trans agenda. As increasing numbers of children show confusion about their gender (discovery of new deep truth about humanity, or internet-fuelled hysteria?), in many cases medical guidelines now do not recommend careful psychological evaluations but only pro-trans indoctrination to parents, and rapid moves to assist transition. In the UK, the government appears to have caved in to trans demands for self-declared gender to trump biological sex in law ([see here for how to respond to the government consultation](#)).

Before Dr van Meter's presentation, the conference heard a moving account of a German woman who had undergone medical procedures to enable her to live as a man after years of distressing gender dysphoria. After initial relief, her depression and intense self-hatred was not resolved, and she sought help. Amazingly, she became a Christian. Following many years of careful therapy, she was able to face the childhood traumas which had led to her wanting to erase her female identity; as part of her journey to wholeness she was able to joyfully accept her creation as female, and live as a woman. One of the psychiatrists who had originally evaluated her, diagnosed her as transgender and recommended hormone and surgical sex change, admitted later in relation to his many cases that he had never seen the drastic and mutilating procedure actually make any of his patients happy.

Dr Christl Vonholdt, who related the story, concluded that professional help and informal counselling to help people live according to their birth sex (if they so wish) is under threat as Western governments are being pressurized by LGBT lobby groups to ban any kind of 'conversion therapy'. Another speaker, Laura Haynes PhD, explained how the new 'orthodoxy' says that feelings of gender dysphoria are clear signs of a 'trans' identity, should be affirmed, and should face no barriers in society whether it is public toilets or medical transition procedures.

In the same way, according to LGBT ideology, same sex attraction indicates that a person is 'gay'; this should be celebrated with encouragement to be 'out and

proud' in identity and practice. If the person experiencing these feelings wants to follow a different path, and seeks help to find possible causes of same sex attraction and explore heterosexual potential, this is seen as 'internalized homophobia' or 'transphobia'. Counselling or therapy which is not LGBT affirming is seen as trying to change 'who you really are'; this must be harmful, according to this dogma, for which there is no scientific basis.

Dr Haynes referred briefly to her participation in campaigns in the US to prevent government bans on so-called conversion therapy, most recently in California. She warned that if such a ban is applied in the UK, it would not just affect therapists (of whom very few practice any form of reparative therapy openly), but bible-believing pastors, church-based counsellors and even parents may be in danger of being criminalized. More and more research shows sexuality is not binary but fluid. New peer reviewed studies show change in sexual orientation can occur with therapy; there is little or no evidence of harm, rather the opposite, as long as the client's aims are respected. The [proposed ban](#) is totalitarian: it makes a mockery of the UK government's claim to be a "diverse and tolerant society".

Dr Haynes' presentation built on the conference's opening paper delivered by Carys Moseley, who works as researcher in public policy for Christian Concern. Dr Moseley has written several articles [critiquing the government's proposed legislation](#) on so-called 'gay cure therapies'. She outlined the dangerous conflation of 'hate speech' and 'counter-extremism' legislation which seeks to control how people think and speak, punishing politically incorrect opinion by treating it as equivalent to terrorist ideology. A ban on the vague and undefined concept of 'conversion therapy' could violate several principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, for example freedom of speech, academic freedom (the right to pursue knowledge where research leads), freedom of association, the right to marriage and family life, and religious freedom. Enforcing such a ban would require giving authority to the police to intercept private conversations over telephone and electronic media.

The conference had opened with a welcome and introductory remarks by IFTCC's Chairman Dr Mike Davidson, who has worked tirelessly to keep in the public domain the question of therapeutic choice for people concerned about sexuality and gender identity issues. Video clips from Core Issues Trust's film "[Voices of the Silenced](#)", released earlier in the year, were shown throughout the

day. In one of the clips he described IFTCC as more than an organization providing an umbrella for professional therapists working in a restricted field. It can also become a movement of people holding on to Judaeo-Christian understandings of gender and sexuality, marriage and family, in a context of increasing “sexual anarchy” deriving from the normalization of secular ideologies.

Why is this of particular relevance to Anglicans? In 2017, General Synod voted for a motion calling on a ban of so-called ‘conversion therapies’, and another motion requesting that baptism liturgies be used to celebrate gender transition. ‘Valuing all God’s Children’, a document aimed at preventing bullying in schools, was written in partnership with Stonewall and opens the door to LGBT advocacy in Church of England schools. Confusingly, some of those Bishops who endorsed these moves are at the same time claiming to stand for the maintaining of traditional bible-based sexual ethics in the church.

# The secular, postmodern re-shaping of church and society

*Dec 11, 2018*

A detailed and helpful article on Wikipedia begins by describing [propaganda](#) as “information that is not objective and is used primarily to influence an audience and further an agenda, often by presenting facts selectively to encourage a particular synthesis or perception, or using loaded language to produce an emotional rather than a rational response to the information that is presented”.

[Saturday's Times](#) [E] featured a story about senior Church of England figures partnering with Government in an Orwellian-style drive to eliminate any means by which people might seek to change their sexual orientation or behaviour if they are not happy with it. The way the story is written bears careful scrutiny as an example of manipulation by subtle propaganda and overt threat.

“Senior Church of England bishops are to begin an inquiry into ‘gay cure’ therapy amid claims that it is still prevalent among religious groups”, we are told, with quotes from the Bishops of Liverpool and Manchester. The implication: something sinister is going on, and who would question the judgement of such eminent Lords Spiritual? The survey will be organised by the Ozanne Foundation, “a Westminster-based charity that promotes equality and diversity in religious organisations worldwide”. It is ironic that Jayne Ozanne, the founder of this charity, has made no secret of her belief that orthodox Christian teaching on sexuality and marriage is psychologically harmful to LGBT people and should be considered abusive and ‘hate speech’ – in other words, the opposite of a culture of liberal tolerance of the ‘diversity’ of different views.

We’re then reminded of the way the full force of the establishment is behind the crackdown on ‘gay conversion’ practices; the government plans to ban it and the C of E’s General Synod supported this in a vote in 2017. But what are we talking about?

“The practice, otherwise known as conversion therapy, ranges from private prayer, fasting and counselling to deliverance ministry, hormone treatment and, according to the government, ‘corrective’ rape.”

In this sentence, a simple everyday religious practice, prayer, is seen as something potentially dangerous to society. ‘Private prayer’ if it relates to change in the area of sexual orientation, should be banned. Then, the sentence conflates such prayer, offered for example in a gentle church setting in response to a request, with a brutal practice associated with poor and lawless slums in Africa where violence against women is tragically and outrageously a daily reality whether they are lesbian or, much more commonly, not. The issue is ‘conversion therapy’ but the sentence doesn’t actually mention trained professional psychotherapy at all, or any of the carefully researched weight of evidence that sexual orientation is fluid and change is experienced by many people, whether mediated through counselling/therapy, or not.

Campaigners say conversion therapy has done serious harm, the report continues. This is a serious accusation which one would expect would be backed up by some kind of scientifically verifiable evidence. Instead, we hear again of Jayne Ozanne’s no doubt genuine experiences of trauma associated with the tension between sexual identity and the Christian faith she was taught. We are reminded of the Hollywood movie ‘Boy Erased’ with its negative portrayal of a supposedly typical examples of ‘gay conversion’ techniques in the US in the 1980’s and 1990’s. And then a quote from Government Equalities Minister Penny Mordaunt, who promises to stop practices which ‘cause self-loathing’. It’s not difficult to see that this ‘evidence’ is at best extremely subjective and at worst, based on a work of fiction (a film). This is surely an example of propaganda in its purest form, being used to curtail a basic freedom to seek help with personal change.

It has long been noted that as human beings we respond at a deep psychological level to images and stories, particularly when we connect to characters with whom we can empathise. This is first a good thing. It has been built into us from creation, and is evidence for the existence of a personal God in whose image we are made. Relationship with him, more than just cerebral understanding about him and the universe, is what we are created for. But from Genesis 3 the human delight in the visual, the complexity of psychology around relationships, and our capacity to envision a future has been manipulated to steer us away from truth

and what's objectively best for us, so that we believe that how we feel about ourselves is the centre of the universe; we serve ourselves, and ultimately evil forces, rather than God. Propaganda and fake news began with the snake in the Garden of Eden.

I had nearly finished this piece when I was alerted to a major new development in the Church of England: the publication of liturgies to mark 'gender transition'. That wasn't such a surprise, as this was accepted by General Synod last year, and then agreed again in February 2018. What is alarming is that the new services, which have been developed by clergy who are transgender activists, have been commended for use by a leading evangelical Bishop. No doubt he will argue that while he believes that God created us male and female, this is a way of offering welcome to those who don't feel they fit into the traditional gender categories. But in speaking about 'trans people' and supporting the liturgies in this way, this Bishop has inevitably accepted the validity of the new ideology of gender, which is incompatible with Christian anthropology, colluding with a fiction which cannot ultimately be pastorally helpful, and based on propaganda and fake science rather than evidence.

Should faithful Christians just accept the decisions of their leaders in these matters, and keep quiet, perhaps focusing on evangelistic courses and foodbanks? Or can we counter this trend? If so, perhaps our challenge is to tell a "better story". We know that heterosexual marriage and sexually abstinent singleness, living within the physical sex God gave us, are the most effective ways of living a flourishing life as individuals and communities, and for our future. Numerous studies prove that stable marriage and family life, and sexual self-control are beneficial for individuals and society; likewise it is clear that family breakdown is linked to crime and mental health issues, and immorality to sexually transmitted disease. The Judaeo-Christian ethic is commanded and explained in Scripture and has been taught by Christians and Jews for millennia. It makes sense. It is the truth. Surely, if the church demonstrates an attitude of love, and tells a positive and exciting counter-story, society will be convinced of the truth of the gospel and how we are supposed to live our lives?

In this paradigm, 'truth' is contained in God's word, backed up by scientific research based on observation of an ordered world. Truth must be communicated clearly, imaginatively, winsomely with love, but it exists as an entity in itself, like a Platonic ideal, or indeed God himself. God exists and his

word is true whether or not we communicate it effectively with love. One plus one equals two, regardless of how effectively and relationally it is taught, or how I feel about it and about myself.

But in the secular postmodern paradigm, things have changed. God, and truth, do not exist outside of the reality which is the interweaved matrix made up of millions of human beings' individual consciousness and experience. The personal story, and the emotions it evokes, is not just a method of communicating truth. It is truth. If feelings of same sex attraction or gender dysphoria lead someone to embrace a gay or trans identity, this is a discovery of truth, and the church's job is to affirm it through liturgies. To suggest that someone with these feelings might be able to explore a different direction is seen as hurtful, even abusive, and should be suppressed by law.

Because of this tendency in us to be drawn to personal constructions of reality and reject Reality, the biblical writers insist that it's not enough to simply repeat God's true message, and to find better ways of communicating it, including demonstrating God's nature through acts of love and mercy. It's also necessary to enable the faithful community to reject the false messages they are being fed constantly in the world around them. Jesus said "you have heard it said...but I say to you..." Faith must be accompanied by repentance, which is not just a decision to say sorry for bad habits, but a constant turning away from false views about oneself and the world, often inculcated subliminally and on the emotional level.

So a vital aspect of prophetic ministry among the people of God, and from the community of the faithful to the world, has been to be aware of the ease with which we can be deceived, to unmask the false messages with which we are being shaped, and the methods of communication that are used. To turn away from them, and to consciously embrace and be shaped by genuine, objective Truth, even if it involves rejection and even persecution.

# More rubicons crossed, more anxiety about the future

*Dec 18, 2018*

At a time when clergy and lay leaders are in the middle of the busiest time of the year, organizing and leading carol services and other evangelistic and social action projects, and are preparing many more sermons than usual, their spare capacity is taken up not with joyful and prayerful Advent devotion, but with a growing sense of anxiety and social media communication about the state of the Church of England. Biblically faithful clergy are often mild-mannered, averse to conflict, focused on the pastoral work in their local area, not wanting to get involved in church politics. But the cumulative effect of recent news has not been conducive to the season of peace and goodwill, and has caused talk of differentiation and even schism to be heard again.

At the end of October, the four Bishops of Oxford Diocese wrote to clergy and lay leaders under their jurisdiction, a letter in which they insisted on the “full inclusion of LGBTI people” in the life of the church; its leadership and giving and receiving of sacraments, with no attempt to deal with the theological issues involved, or to distinguish between sexual orientation, behaviour, and ideology. [I said at the time](#) that this was nothing less than “the privileging of LGBT advocacy rather than gospel perspectives at the heart of Diocesan ministry”, and [in a second post](#), that while the Bishops claim they have not changed church doctrine, their letter “effectively warns clergy against ways of teaching and offering welcome, pastoral care and the opportunity of discipleship guided by the church’s official doctrinal position”.

I’ve been told that the Bishop of Oxford was confident that he would only receive opposition from a small handful of conservative evangelical churches in the Diocese. While discussions among clergy with orthodox Christian beliefs are ongoing regarding what action to take (more news in the New Year), I’m led to believe that the number of those willing to align with a public protest will be considerable.



Then, at the beginning of December, the secular press alerted us to progress in the government's plans to legally prohibit all forms of 'gay conversion therapy', ranging from obviously abusive and illegal practices to professional psychotherapy or even private prayer in response to requests from individuals unhappy with sexual orientation, identity and/or behaviour. This profoundly illiberal ban would of course interfere with pastoral practice and even freedom of speech and belief in churches, but the government are being aided in their plans by senior Church of England figures including the Bishops of Manchester and Liverpool, and Jayne Ozanne. This is an example of LGBT advocacy which is powerful and oppressive, based on fake science and emotion-inducing story rather than evidence-based reason and revelation, which [I have written about here](#).

Bible-believing Christians have in recent years been largely reluctant to get involved in this issue, but encouragingly, some interdenominational networks are showing signs of realising the dangers and possibly giving some leadership in the near future.

The biggest response of all by the faithful to the ongoing capitulation of the Church of England's leadership to LGBT lobbying, has been the outpouring of opposition to the House of Bishops' guidance on liturgies to celebrate gender transition. The press release from the Church of England [is here](#). The actual liturgy itself has not changed, and is found in the service of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith within a celebration of Holy Communion [here, about half way down](#).

The Bishops promised in February's Synod to give guidance as to how this service might be adapted to mark the new identity of a transgender person. [I wrote about this at the time](#). The guidance itself [has now been published](#). It contains a number of theologically contentious statements about baptism and re-naming, and instructions about how to minister pastorally to trans people. It directs clergy to affirm and celebrate gender transition and taking on of new identities, without any discussion having taken place within the C of E on the matter.

The process has apparently been directed by two 'trans women' clergy, who are known for their campaigning for the full acceptance of transgender ideology. This in itself would be cause for serious concern. But evangelicals were appalled

to see that the Chair of the Committee which has overseen this process is Julian Henderson of Blackburn. Confusingly, Henderson is President of the Church of England Evangelical Council and has put his name to documents robustly defending orthodox Christian sexual ethics, and yet he claimed that the guidance for transgender renaming liturgies was “rooted in Scripture”.

Within a few days, though, it appeared that Henderson had backtracked. He was one of the signatories on a paper strongly criticising the Bishops’ Guidance which had been issued under his name. This [document from CEEC](#) concludes that the transgender liturgies “establish a position which is incompatible with biblical teaching”. Bishop Henderson has come under fire for the incoherence of his position, with many people speculating on whether this is a result of him being culpably ignorant of the issues around the transgender debate, or just weak in submitting to strong pressure. The response from CEEC itself has also been criticised for having such a feeble conclusion to its otherwise strong statement, where it calls for “reassuring clarifications and, where necessary, modifications” to the Bishops’ Guidance, rather than rejection of it altogether.

Not surprisingly there have been numerous calls for Bishop Julian to resign from his leadership position within the evangelical grouping, which is due to hold its annual residential conference in January, and also questions about the usefulness of an organisation which appears wedded to a policy of keeping a respectful evangelical voice within the increasingly revisionist establishment rather than taking more robust action against it. A number of articles commenting on this latest fiasco from the Church of England can be found in [this collection here](#).

This week I have been in touch with some young clergy who are seriously thinking about leaving the Church of England, and others who have informed their PCC’s that they will not implement the latest guidance from Bishops. Are we at last heading for schism? Would no schism (meaning compromise and accommodation with heresy and diktats from government and lobby groups) actually be a worse outcome than a disorderly breakup of the Church of England?

I recently came across a letter which I think I submitted to Church of England Newspaper in 2009, although it wasn’t published. Here it is (The only slightly out-of date idea here is the presence of four bank branches on the same street!):

*Sir,*

*Jonathan Petre in his piece of a couple of weeks ago (5 October) refers to Archbishop Rowan Williams' "nightmare" of "rival Anglican churches competing with each other on the same street". Rev David Keen in his letter a week later (12 October) continues the theme, and is concerned that this scenario of different factions of the church insisting on their own interpretation of the Christian faith is damaging to mission.*

*In my street there are three banks, two newsagents, three fast food outlets, three hairdressers. They each offer a slightly different service, and all survive healthily enough. Is that also a "nightmare"? If a fourth bank opens a branch, will people turn away in disgust at the disunity shown in the financial services industry, and decide they don't need money at all?*

*There is also an Anglican church, an independent evangelical church and an African Pentecostal church. Is that also a "nightmare" and if so, why? Are the vast majority of non-Christians really less likely to seek God and go to church if there is more than one church in their area?*

*I can envisage a situation where there might be a fourth church in the street or nearby, with proud Anglican ancestry, (maybe with a different name?), loyal to the doctrines contained in the BCP and the 39 Articles, strongly linked to thousands of churches across the world who believe similar things. So there would be two "Anglican" churches, one offering welcome and inclusion to all (though I suspect not many would turn up), and the other humbly attempting to explain and live what the Christian faith actually is. They would not be competing with each other, as they are offering different products and services. Why would this be a nightmare?*