

Clarion

A photograph of a woman with long, wavy brown hair and glasses, seen in profile from the chest up. She is looking out a window, with a bright orange vertical light source visible in the background. The image is used as a background for the magazine cover.

Gender and Sexuality

What's Inside

Our eighth issue of this year brings a number of articles on the topic of gender and sexuality. This begins with Rev. Eric Kampen's lead article, "Foreign Language," and also includes "It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone" by Rev. Jan DeGelder and "The Truth About Transgender" by Rev. Rob Schouten.

The rest of this issue's pages are filled with the Treasures, New & Old meditation, Mission News, and Ray of Sunshine.

Laura Veenendaal

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Clarion

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; **Copy Manager:** Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuwer, E. Kampen, J. Van Vliet, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

CLARION

8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca



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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Canada 

LEAD ARTICLE



Eric Kampen *Minister*
Canadian Reformed Church
Orangeville, Ontario
rev.e.kampen@gmail.com

Foreign Language

In Canada, it is not unusual to hear people speaking many different languages. Our response may be one of fascination or, if we are the only one in a crowded elevator who doesn't speak the language and therefore don't understand what others are saying, one of slight irritation. Besides hearing different languages, we also hear different dialects. We easily pick out one with a strong British, Scottish, or Australian accent, or the accent of one for whom English is their second language. It can be challenging to understand one another but, with some effort, we can communicate.

There is a third situation involving language. We may overhear a group of people talking. It is clear they are speaking English, but we cannot understand them because of their terminology. This can happen when you walk into a meeting of nuclear scientists or overhear a group of contractors engaged in shop talk. One may get a sense of what the latter are talking about, but each profession has its own lingo. At the same time, it can happen that we cannot understand them because, while speaking English, they profess a different worldview. What I am thinking of here is terminology such as "cisgender," "gender non-conforming," "non-binary," "ze," "zie," "xe," "hir," for example.

Glossary

It is not difficult to find a glossary of these examples of unfamiliar terms. The following is a sampling taken from the City of Toronto's "Guidelines for Accommodating Gender Identity and Gender Expression."

Cisgender: Cisgender is used to explain the phenomena where a person's gender identity is in line with or "matches" the sex they were assigned at birth. Cis can also be used as a prefix to an assortment of words to refer to the alignment of gender identity and the assigned at birth sex status including: cisnormativity, cissexual, cisgender, cis male, cis female.

Gender: Gender is based on the expectations and stereotypes about behaviours, actions, and roles linked to being a "man" or "woman" within a particular culture or society. The social norms related to gender can vary depending on the culture and can change over time.

Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming/Gender variant:

Individuals who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. They may identify and express themselves as "feminine men" or "masculine women" or as androgynous, outside of the categories "boy/man" and "girl/woman." People who are gender non-conforming may or may not identify as trans.

Gender spectrum: The representation of gender as a continuum, as opposed to a binary concept.

Intersex: A term used to describe a person born with reproductive systems, chromosomes, and/or hormones that are not easily characterized as male or female. This might include a woman with XY chromosomes or a man with ovaries instead of testes. Intersex characteristics occur in one out of every 1,500 births. Typically, intersex people are assigned one sex, male or female, at birth. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not, and some choose to identify as intersex. Intersex people may or may not identify as trans or transgender.

Sex: Sex is the classification of people as male, female, or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person's reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes, and other physical characteristics.

Sexual orientation: Sexual orientation is the direction of

one's sexual interest or attraction. It is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of human sexuality from lesbian and gay, to bisexual and straight.

Trans/Transgender: Trans/Transgender is an umbrella term that describes people with diverse gender identities and gender expressions that do not conform to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man in society. "Trans" can mean transcending beyond, existing between, or crossing over the gender spectrum. It includes but is not limited to people who identify as transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers, or gender non-conforming (gender variant or gender-queer).

Trans identities include people whose gender identity is different from the gender associated with their birth-assigned sex. Trans people may or may not undergo medically supportive treatments, such as hormone therapy and a range of surgical procedures, to align their bodies with their internally felt gender identity.

Transition: Transition refers to a host of activities that some trans people may pursue to affirm their gender identity. This may include changes to their name, sex designation, dress, the use of specific pronouns, and possibly medically supportive treatments such as hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery, or other procedures. There is no checklist or average time for a transition process, and no universal goal or endpoint. Each person will decide what meets their needs.

Two-spirit: Two-spirit is a term used by Indigenous people to describe from a cultural perspective people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, or intersex. It is used to capture a concept that exists in many different Indigenous cultures and languages. For some, the term two-spirit describes a societal and spiritual role that certain people played within traditional societies; they were often mediators, keepers of certain ceremonies; they transcended accepted roles of men and women and filled a role as an established middle gender.

There has been a radical change in talking and thinking about gender

The following explanation of personal pronouns was taken from the University of Wisconsin LGBTQ+ Resource Center:

Ze/hir/hir (Tyler ate hir food because ze was hungry.) Ze is pronounced like “zee,” can also be spelled zie or xe, and replaces she/he/they. Hir is pronounced like “here” and replaces her/hers/him/his/they/theirs.

There are many more terms that could be considered, including, but not limited to, androgynous, gender diverse, gender expansive, gender fluid, agender, bigender, genderqueer, pangender, MTF (male to female), and FTM (female to male) (see, for example, the New York City site giving guidance on gender identity expression).

Dueling word views

How can it be that these words sound so foreign to our ears? It is because they come from a worldview which has no place for God as he has revealed himself in his Word. We read in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him.” In the second chapter of Genesis, we learn how the creation of man was a two-step process. God first created the man. When the man became aware that he was alone, God created the first woman. The woman is the man’s indispensable helper in fulfilling the creation commission to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth, subduing it, and having dominion over all the

creatures in sea, earth and sky. It is rather obvious that biology determines gender. The biological distinction between male and female is very evident in the way only the woman is able to give birth to children.

Contrast this to the worldview where we hear words like cisgender, transgender, ze, hir, zie, or xe. In this worldview, gender is not determined by biology, but by what you feel you are. In this worldview, people will speak of gender assigned at birth, based on one’s reproductive system, but this may not be the gender you really are. You will have to decide at some point. In sum, gender is not rooted in your biology but in your will. If your will and your biology do not line up, some will pursue the drastic measure of gender modification therapy. For those born as females, this may mean mastectomies and removing the uterus. For those born with a male body, this may also mean surgery to remove certain body parts as well as hormone therapy.

How has this come about?

If one looks over the last fifty years of history, it is evident that there has been a radical change in talking and thinking about gender. A word like cisgender, for example, began to appear only in the 1990s. How has this change come about?

It is not difficult to see a connection between the rise of these views on gender and the receding of the place of the Christian faith in society. A brief surge in church attendance after the Second World War began to decline in the 1960s. As the decades passed, Christian values have increasingly been marginalized, even demonized. As people who used to be in the closet with respect to sexual views and practices came out of the closet, God was stuck in the closet. When God’s put away, people go astray.

The root, however, can be traced back further. It lies in the fall into sin. There man’s nature became totally corrupt. Every aspect of humanity, including our sexuality, has been affected by that fall. Sexual issues have always been laying latent in the sinful human heart. It was evident in Lamech, who took two wives. It was evident in the conduct of the people in Sodom and Gomorrah and the Canaanites. It was evident in the days of Paul, as we can see in the opening chapter of the letter to the Romans, and his repeated instruction in proper sexual conduct in various letters (e.g., 1 Cor 5 & 6; Eph 5; 1 Thess 4).

It is evident not only in sexual conduct but also in sexual confusion, or, as it is called, gender dysphoria. As the fall into sin has affected every aspect of human nature, it is not surprising that it shows up in sexual feelings which do not line

Here is a contrast of the languages of two kingdoms

up with one's biological gender. We do well to remember that every sin and sinful inclination can appear in the lives of God's people as well, for it is simply the old nature trying to reassert itself. The devil continues to sing his seductive siren song, with the subtle refrain, "Did God actually say...?"

The gospel response

Amid this sexual confusion, we should remember the gospel of redemption. Redemption means forgiveness of sins, including sexual sins. It is also restoration to a lost condition. As is evident in our Lord forgiving of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), as well as the presence in the Christian congregations of those who had formerly lived sexually immoral lives (1 Cor 6:9-11), the cross covers all sexual sins. God's grace, however, is not that we may sin even more, but that we begin to walk in the way of the Holy Spirit. There is a distinct biblical sexual ethic, which includes a distinct understanding that one's gender is obvious from the day one is born.


The awareness of the effect of the fall into sin on our whole nature, including our sexuality, should make us compassionate with those who struggle with sexual issues. We do well to keep in mind that it is not only those who struggle with gender issues who show the effect of the fall into sin, but also those who are struggling with lustful thoughts or who are drawn to pornography, either while single or married. Being compassionate is not the same as tolerating or accepting conduct that God forbids. Rather, it is realizing the lifelong struggle against sin and the sinful nature.

The gospel will determine how to address those of the world. We can be sympathetic to their plight, seeing how they are under the dominion of Satan. At the same time, we may hold



before them the gospel as it exposes sin and holds out hope for all sinners. This may come across as harsh and cruel, but it is an expression of love, for the gospel is the only true balm for the soul unto eternal life.

Language of God's love

In this world, the gospel will sound like a foreign language, even a dead language, as it speaks of sin, a Saviour, and calls for a life of service. There will be pressure to bring the gospel language in harmony with the language of the world. It will not be possible though, for here is a contrast of the languages of two kingdoms, namely, the kingdom of God in contrast to the kingdom of darkness. It is not the language of the kingdom of God that is a dead language. Rather, it is the language of God's love, the language of eternal life. The language of the kingdom of darkness promises life, but it brings eternal death. The gospel has conquered hearts in the past. It is still doing so. It will continue to do so, not by toning it down or trying to make it in harmony with the language of the world, but by simply speaking it faithfully. It may come across as folly to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God unto salvation. 

The House of Mourning

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart."

(ECCLESIASTES 7:2)

I remember reading Ecclesiastes 7:2 as a teenager and finding it deeply disturbing and extremely counterintuitive. Why would we want to go to a place of sadness over a place of celebration? Shouldn't the Christian life be a joyful one?


But we learn more from funerals than from parties. Funerals force us to consider our own mortality. They remind us that life does not go on forever under the sun. In the house of mourning, we are reminded that death awaits us all. As a result, the house of mourning forces us to consider the more significant questions of life. It forces us to consider existential questions like: What is the meaning of existence? What happens when I die? Is there a God?

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes teaches us to value things with lasting consequences; things which can teach us important lessons. And that means valuing things which may not be particularly enjoyable, like going to the house of mourning.

Being confronted by death, we can be better equipped to truly live, for death can teach us about what should matter to us in life. We can evaluate the importance of our daily work by asking ourselves if we will think on our death beds, "If only I had spent more hours at the office." We might evaluate the impact we have on those around us by asking, "Would anyone care if I died? Who would make the effort to come to my funeral?"

Even more significantly, as believers we might consider how the reality of death can make us treasure the great promises of God; it can drive us to a deeper appreciation of the good news concerning Jesus Christ. When we think of death, we can be reminded of Paul's words of triumph in 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55, "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and

the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'" We can be reminded of Paul's confidence in the face of death when he tells the Philippians, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (1:24). The good news that Jesus Christ has conquered death; the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead; that's going to hit us harder at a funeral than at a party. The promise of life everlasting means more when we're directly confronted with the power of the grave.

The Preacher tells us, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." The house of mirth refers to a place of self-indulgent feasting and abundant drinking. It is a place where we can expect to find temporary joy and comfort. The house of mourning is a place of sorrow and grief, but it is also a place where we are more likely to find eternal joy and comfort. 

For Further Study

1. How would you feel if you knew you were going to die tomorrow?
2. How do the promises of God help you to face the reality that death is the end of all mankind?



By Randall Visscher Minister
Canadian Reformed Church
Grand Valley, Ontario
randallvisscher@gmail.com



It Is Not Good for the Man to Be Alone

A few years ago, a brother in the Lord, in his late twenties, wrote the following:

At this stage in my life the men of my own age in the circle of my friends and family are all getting married. I love that. I enjoy celebrating those occasions with them. But there is one moment on those days I would rather skip. That's when we read in the Marriage Form that the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone."

These words touch me deeply, because I have homosexual feelings. Does anybody in the church realize how incredibly hard this is? The same God who says that it is not good for a man to be alone, designed his pattern for marriage in such a way that he leaves no room for me to have a partner in life.

Think of this when your brother or sister, usually after a time of confusion, fear, struggle, and emotional upheaval, is coming "out," as they call it. He is gay ... and he sits beside you in the pew! Then what?

What are we talking about?

Of course, they are well aware of the wide range of views and opinions. Some may be taken in by the views of the LGBTQ

community and avoid talking about God's will for their lives. Others don't mind this conversation. They have become convinced that God's Word does not reject monogamous, committed, and faithful same-sex relationships.

There are also those as the one quoted above.

I have homosexual feelings. That will (probably) never change. I will have to live and struggle with this – most likely for the rest of my life. That will be hard, but I can do so in faith, because I believe that God does not want me to have a homosexual relationship. My sexual orientation is not the most important part of who I am. I belong to Jesus Christ, and I want to serve God according to his will. And I need the church community to help me with this.

To avoid misunderstanding – first a disclaimer. This article is not about gender dysphoria, transgender issues, etc. Over the last few years this topic has rapidly overtaken the public discussion in this whole field. But others are more qualified to address this than I am.

Here is the question on which I want to reflect: How does the gospel of Jesus make the church a safe and good place for the gay and lesbian believer, when that church says "no" to homosexual relations?

We believe that all things happen under the umbrella of God's sovereign power. Somehow this includes even the brokenness of this sinful life. But you cannot say: "If this is how I am, God cannot forbid me to act on it." That's not a logical conclusion in a broken and sinful world.

Terminology is important

It is good to think a bit more about the terminology we use here. For some, a homosexual believer is an oxymoron. One can read about homosexual behaviour, condition, orientation, feelings, attraction, and desires, but they lump it all together as sinful desires and acts.

They refer to Jesus's words in Matthew 5:28, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

In other words, the lustful desire is just as sinful as the action of adultery. In Matthew 5 it is heterosexual, but that doesn't make a difference. It is also true for homosexuals: lustful desire is just as sinful as the action.

That's correct. But it's not the whole story. In Matthew 5:28 the lustful (sexual) desire of a man for a woman who is not his wife is sin. However, the fact that a man is attracted to a woman is not sinful. That's in line with God's design in Genesis 2:24. In Matthew 5, Jesus addresses the lustful desire, but not the attraction as such.

Although it is much more controversial than it used to be, in my view it remains helpful to make the careful distinction between orientation and attraction, desire, and behaviour and lifestyle.

I believe that having a same-sex attraction is, as such, not a sin. It is the result of sin. We are all born in sin and by sin; God's

good creation has been damaged, broken in many different ways. In homosexuals the good attraction has been distorted. Temptations are not sin either. We all face temptations. But we are to resist those, because giving in to temptations leads to sin, first in the form of lustful desires, and then resulting in sinful behaviour. Think of James 1:14-15.

The origin – relevant?

Connected with this is the discussion about the question, "What causes homosexuality?" Is somebody *born* gay, or did he *become* gay? Here again, opinions differ: from the view that it is just a learned mindset and learned behaviour, to the claims of the LGBTQ community that homosexuality is simply a sexual variation, just as natural as heterosexuality, like the difference between blue eyes and brown eyes, or blond hair and black hair.

But whatever it is that brings this about in someone's life, I believe that homosexuality is a result of our innate sinfulness. We are all broken people because we are all affected by sin, and every part of us is affected by sin. However, not everyone has been affected in the same way. The question is: What do you do with it?

Think of someone who is hot tempered. You can't help that you have this short fuse, but that doesn't make it right to explode in a fit of anger and become violent when something

happens you don't agree with. You can submit yourself to anger management. You can pray about it, because you know that self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. All this may help you to control yourself, but it does not mean that your temper is gone.

The homosexual will say: "This is how I am. I have these feelings, this attraction, and it won't go away!" I accept that. But does this imply that now I must also accept the idea that this is how God wants you to live and act? The question is: what does the Holy God expect you to do with this? We believe that all things happen under the umbrella of God's sovereign power. Somehow this includes even the brokenness of this sinful life. But you cannot say: "If this is how I am, God cannot forbid me to act on it."

That's not a logical conclusion in a broken and sinful world.

What does God say?

Therefore, where homosexuality meets Christianity, the urgent question is: What does God himself say about homosexuality? The five passages in the centre of this discussion are Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:9-11, and Romans 1:21-32.

There are many exegetical studies available on this. Some will tell you that in these passages the Bible address the sexual immorality that came with pagan idol-worship, in temple prostitution. But that's different today, they say. The Bible is just not familiar with loving, monogamous, and faithful same-sex relationships as we know them today. However - this statement is based more on wishful thinking than on what we know about sexuality in the ancient cultures.

But let's not restrict ourselves to a few texts. It is just as important to look at the grand framework of God's design for marriage and sexuality, as revealed throughout the Bible. It's all about the relationship (including sexual relations) between one man and one woman, as reflected in the Creation story and the rest of Scripture.

We can never get around the fact that whenever the Bible speaks about sexuality - and that's often - there is never an indication anywhere that the Bible has something positive to say about homosexual relations.

Fixing or healing

Another controversial issue is whether through biblical counselling, prayer, repentance, and forgiveness the damage can be undone. Perhaps the homosexual can turn around and become

a heterosexual with the help of "conversion" or "reparative therapy."

Let's be cautious. Not just because we have laws that make "conversion therapy" a crime, but the success stories of such a change are few and far between. Christian conversion therapy that uses the Christian faith to "fix" or "cure" homosexuality into heterosexuality is wrong. "Healing" is a better word. "Healing" in the sense that the man or woman with the homosexual orientation or attraction must be confirmed or restored in his/her relationship with God and find freedom and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." That's a powerful transformation! The solution to all sin is the atoning blood of Jesus. His blood sets us free from the dominion of sin, including the sin of homosexual behaviour. Repentance and victory over sin are God's gifts. But at this side of eternity, we still experience the brokenness of our sinful flesh. We all do.

Sons and daughters of the King can be full members of the body of Christ and still feel unwanted homosexual attraction, as they continue to struggle with sexual temptation, and that's hard. However, the answer to "being gay" is not "being straight," but being whole in Christ Jesus and by grace dedicated to serving God as a living sacrifice, according to his will and so desiring to live for his glory.

Questions we are facing

What do we do, not only as office-bearers, but as church community when we find this brother or sister in our church community, among our friends and family? They want to live as God's children and follow Jesus Christ. At the same time, they get the aggressive in-your-face messages from the LGBTQ-community in our over-sexualized culture that your sexuality determines who you are, and how you should live.

How can we be more pro-active, so that this brother or sister dares to come to us without the fear of being condemned and rejected?

How can we make sure that the homosexual brother or sister can trust that the church of Jesus Christ is a safe place for him or her, a place where they will experience the encouraging support they need in their struggle to submit to the Word of God?

How can we help him to see and use his gifts and abilities for serving God and his neighbour within the biblical boundaries?

Some observations

- Homosexuals in the church often experience that in the church there is not much understanding for the problems with which they are struggling.
- In Genesis 2:18 God says that it is not good for the man to be alone. The person with the homosexual attraction struggles with this. How can the same God tell him elsewhere in the Bible that he must be alone for the rest of his life? He will never experience the same kind of loving intimacy that his heterosexual friends will be able to enjoy.
- If he comes "out" and says: "I am a Christian and I have homosexual feelings," he may meet fear, ridicule, or unbelief. How can you be a Christian and have same-sex attraction at the same time?
- The result is a feeling of being rejected and isolated. When that happens, the temptation becomes strong to find solace outside the church, in the homosexual sub-culture of the world. There he feels understood, accepted, and supported. But they will not accept him either if he says that, as a Christian, he wants to obey God's Word and remain celibate.

I conclude with some considerations. That's exactly what these are: thoughts to consider, think about, pray about, talk about, and perhaps discuss.

God's children, created in his image and saved by grace

Treat your homosexual brother or sister as what we all are: Created in God's image, with damaged, corrupted, sinful human natures (as we all have), but also God's loved children, saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. We all live by the love of God in the mercy of Christ. Jesus died for them and bought them with his precious blood, and the Holy Spirit renews them. This is one of the most powerful and transformative things you can say to them, transformative in the sense of Romans 12:1-2.

Safe in the church

Let your homosexual brother or sister (and all your church members!) feel that there is no place on earth where a sinful human being should be safer than within the church of Jesus Christ. In the church the powers of God's Word and Spirit are at work. Here is the protective care of Jesus Christ, who loves you. As fellow believers we should all reflect this love, of course.

Grace determines what you are in Christ

Point each other to Paul's words in Romans 6:11, 12, "Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires." Never forget what you are in Christ Jesus. Never forget who runs your life. And as the struggle with same-sex attraction remains, also remember 2 Corinthians 12:8, 9. Whatever it was that Paul was tormented by, he wrote, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

Bearing fruit for the Kingdom

Encourage your homosexual brother or sister: Don't be obsessed by what you have to fight against. It's hard, but try not to see your sexual identity, your same-sex attraction, as the cause of all your problems. Focus on the good gifts God gives to all his children, the positive goals God sets before us, as in Philippians 4:4-8. Show them that this is the way to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit will enable us, even if we continue to struggle. Some of us (gay or straight) may remain single for the rest of our lives.

Forgiven and made alive in Christ

Help your homosexual brother or sister not to give up on the community of the church, even if people don't get it. Like everyone else, you'll need people to trust in and confide in. But there is no requirement to broadcast everywhere that you're gay. This is not a matter of being ashamed of who you are, but you must come to the place in your life that you don't need to talk about your sexuality all the time.

This is possible when you realize that there is more to life than your sexual orientation. Learn to talk about yourself as "a sinner, who has been forgiven and made alive in Christ." *How deep the Father's love for us.* Then homosexuals and heterosexuals learn to say "no" to sexual activities outside the boundaries set by the Holy God.

No offensive or hurtful comments

Some may say or believe that a homosexual person may be prepared to handle offensive or hurtful comments from his brothers and sisters. However, let this be clear: there is in the church of Christ never an excuse for offensive or hurtful comments. Let our churches grow into places where our gay brother or sister feels comfortable talking also about this aspect of their lives.

Suggested Literature

www.robgagnon.net

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Sanctification – an ongoing struggle

We all struggle to break the link between seeing an attractive person and sexual desires. Help your homosexual brother or sister to accept the reality of the same-sex attraction, and to steer away from translating this attraction into a sexual or romantic desire. And try to understand the depth of the struggle that comes with this. Share with him that for any Christian believer sanctification is an ongoing process, which makes struggle and suffering essential aspects of the Christian life.

Trials and temptations

Trials and temptations will arise in this life. Remember what it says in James 1:2-4. In Jesus Christ, you can be free from the grip that homosexuality had over your life, but that does not mean that you will live without temptations. Yet, trials and temptations are not sins. They come to test the perseverance of your faith. But always remember this: If we try to face trials and temptations without relying on God, we will all fail.

By yourself but never alone

Explain to your homosexual brother or sister that it is not our idea that they should go alone in life, without a marriage partner. The church does not make that up. We have no right to put that burden on someone. Only the God who has said "it is not good for the man to be alone," only he has the right to ask you to go your life alone, because he is the only One who can make sure that you will never be alone! In his grace he will give you the most wonderful relationship in which you can share everything in your life, your relationship with Jesus Christ. *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear ... in his arms he'll take and shield you....* That does come without a physical relationship, without sexual intimacy. That can be very difficult. But it is worth the price. That's the good news for all of us.

Whole in Jesus Christ

There is good news. When, by God's grace, you don't let your same-sex attraction turn into lustful desires and acts, you may think you will feel empty and unfulfilled. That's what the world will tell you. But see what you get in turn from Jesus, who makes you "right before God:" peace, wholeness, gladness, and hope! Trust that Jesus will complete every aspect of who you are, in a way that your preferred homosexual relationship never could.

Longing for love

It is true that homosexual desires and behaviour are a sinful version of godly desires and behaviour. The Bible is clear about that. They keep you from living the life that God wants you to live. But when we say this, we should not forget that people who pursue same-sex relationships are in this way pursuing the desire we all have, the desire for love and affection. Wanting to be loved and wanting to show and receive affection is not sinful. It is good! God created us with these desires and put these in our hearts. Share, therefore, with the homosexuals in your midst, who long for love, the message of the greatest and best love there is, God's love in Jesus Christ. What they are looking for can be found in God on a much deeper and more wonderful level than they could ever find in any human relationship. And that's true for all of us.

The struggle is real and so is God's promise

The homosexual who turns away from homosexual desires and behaviour to follow Christ, and so pays the price for obeying his heavenly Father, embarks on a difficult journey. But when God declares him righteous, adopts her as his child, opens his eyes for his glory, and so transforms her more and more into the likeness of Christ, how can we ignore or avoid them?

And to our gay and lesbian fellow believer, we acknowledge that your struggle is real and hard. But we love you and embrace you as our brother and sister in Jesus. The God who said, "It is not good for the man to be alone," added in Genesis 2: "I will make a helper suitable for him." Always remember, with Jesus as your Helper you have more in common with heterosexual fellow believers, than with homosexuals who are not Christian believers. 📺



Jan DeGelder Minister Emeritus
Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church
Flamborough, Ontario
jdegelder@cogeco.ca

The Truth about Transgender

Just when we think that things could not get any crazier, we hear a story that pushes the moral meter into a zone of extremity which we did not even know existed. For me, one such moment was the determination in early 2020 by a British Columbia judge that a father's refusal to refer to his daughter as a boy and his efforts to oppose her "transition" constituted "family violence." This father had gone to court to stop his fifteen-year-old daughter from undergoing hormone injections, arguing that she lacked the maturity to understand the radical and long-term consequences of such injections. He also argued that she had been unduly influenced by transgender activists.

How did the world get to such a state that a father can be threatened with arrest and jail time for the "crime" of addressing his daughter as "she" instead of her preferred "he?" How can it be that one of the first actions of a new president of the United States in January of 2021 was to sign an executive order mandating that trans women athletes (biologically born boys who now identify as female) must be allowed to compete with biological women and girls, despite their physical advantages? How was it possible that J. K. Rowling, the renowned author of the Harry Potter books and a feminist cultural icon, could suddenly face the wrath of activists for saying that being a woman is not simply a pose one can adopt by choice?

Loss of objective meaning and the cult of feelings

To understand these and many similar events, we need to step back for a moment to consider the cultural revolution of the last several hundred years. Only by doing this will we realize that transgender activists have their own logic, one that radically conflicts with those of our Christian confession.

Ever since the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, the cultural elites of our society have rejected the Bible as God's revelation of the truth about human nature, human depravity, and human redemption. Despite their rejection of supernatural revelation, however, the thinkers of the Enlightenment continued to embrace the notions of objective truth and objective meaning. For them, the truth about nature and life could be reached through the exercise of reason.

Over time, though, the unleashing of reason and science proved unable to create the expected world of endless progress and abiding peace. Slowly but surely, our civilization lost confidence in its ability to arrive at objective and universally valid ideas regarding morality, history, and society. Bereft now of God's revelation and having lost confidence in the objectivity of reason, society was left without any external authority to give guidance regarding matters such as human sexuality.

What do you have when God's Word is unheard and when reason is no longer trusted to produce a common understanding of the world? In short, you have an I-world (think iPhone, iTunes, iPod)! In such a world, every individual is free to construct his or her own meaning. Instead of accepting sexual realities as God-given or at least as grounded in the objectivity of nature (anatomy is destiny), people today tend to see their sexual identity and sexual expression as entirely personal. We get to define our own sexual realities because there is really nothing objective outside of ourselves to which we must or even could conform our lives. It is an iSex world out there!

Even if the trajectory of our own lives as Christians is not the same as that of our society, we all feel the impact of the changed world in which we live. We sense how difficult it is in our cultural climate to challenge people's self-expression and self-definition. If someone has homosexual feelings, we are made to feel that we can never question them. Similarly, if someone has sexual feelings and personal identity intuitions which do not align with their biological body, the only thing to do is accept what that person is experiencing. Any attempt to "correct" the sexual feelings of another person will be treated as an act of violence to the dignity of a human being. We

We cannot accept our human feelings as decisive or normative

are not surprised, then, to learn that our national government seeks to prohibit any kind of "conversion therapy." It would be a violation of the morality of the iSex world.

Responding to an ideology

How ought we to respond as disciples of Christ to the transgender ideology? The answer lies in three familiar words: creation, fall, and redemption. These biblical words lead us out of the moral solipsism of our culture into the clear light of God's eternal truth.

In the beginning, says the Bible, God created human beings in binary mode as male and female. The Creator pronounced this distinction within the human family to be definitive and good. Each human being comes into the world already defined by God as male and female. Sexual identity is not a human choice but a divinely determined reality for each of us. What a person feels, whether fleetingly or more enduringly, cannot trump what God has made us to be: male or female.

However, the biblical narrative speaks to us also of the reality of the Fall. Because of the Fall, we do not live in a normal world. Instead, our present world is one of disorder, decay, and death. Because of human rebellion against God, even the material world in which we live is spoiled. Our physical and mental existence likewise has been degraded. We think futile thoughts. We experience feelings of anxiety, depression, alienation, and stress. Left unchecked, our desires would destroy us. Our bodies, our intellect, our feelings, and our desires are all disordered. We are just a shadow of the inwardly harmonious creatures God made us to be!

Compassion but not approval

Because of what we know about creation and the fall, people who experience gender dysphoria deserve our compassion. They are experiencing a strong degree of emotional, psychological, and relational pain due to their gender dysphoria and that needs to be acknowledged. Nobody is completely sure how or why gender dysphoria appears, sometimes quite suddenly, but for our purposes, this is irrelevant.

What matters is that we must meet people where they are as they experience unsettling and deeply alarming incongruities between their biology and their mental experience of life. If we confess the Fall and if we are honest about how the Fall manifests itself in our own life as sexual beings, we will have plenty of compassion for individuals with transgender feelings. What they experience is not necessarily reflective of willful disobedience against God but simply a symptom of life in a fallen world.

Compassion, however, does not mean endorsement, nor does it legitimize radical actions such as hormone therapy or surgery or cross-dressing. Instead, we need to keep in mind God's creational design and, equally, his redemptive purposes. Because God is our Creator and Redeemer, we cannot accept our human feelings as decisive or normative. We do not agree that people can be authentic only as they follow their own desires.

A Christian with transgender feelings must be encouraged to live by faith in our crucified and risen Saviour! As believers, we find our identity not in what we find in our own psyches, but rather in Christ. We are not defined by our sexual feelings, but by our faith union with our Lord and Saviour. He abides in us and we abide in him and so we are belonging-to-Christ-with-body-and-soul people!

Instead of taking our own feelings as normative, believers seek the ongoing transformation of their lives into the image of Christ! Instead of elevating human passions as decisive, we aim to present our bodies as living sacrifices of thankfulness to Christ. Transformation and not normalization is the name of the Christian religion! Powers of the future age are already at work in us to shape us toward our resurrection destiny when at last the effects of the fall will be completely reversed.

At the same time, we are not yet experiencing the fullness of the Kingdom of God and, for this reason, a measure of ongoing dissonance can be expected in our lives. A Christian faith does not in all cases remove transgender inclinations. There is tension between what we are in Christ and what is

today the case in a still-fallen world. Such tension demands patience and motivates us to persevering prayer.

Some guidelines

How do we apply the Christian story of creation, fall, redemption, and glory to the struggles and sins of people with transgender feelings? What do we do when people we know and love in our families and churches become open about their feelings?

First, let us be sure to avoid jokes and ridicule. If you are in so much pain that you are contemplating a form of surgical mutilation to bring relief, it would be devastating to have people making fun of you. In the church, we must not mock people; instead, we grant them space to reveal their struggles and we offer them our loving support and encouragement. A warm and loving environment creates room also for exhortation and warning.

Secondly, if the person manifesting transgender feelings is a child, do not panic. Many adolescents and teens have temporary gender dysphoria. Growing up is not easy! Young people go through tremendous stresses and strains as they adjust to changing bodies and emerging desires. When you add to this the potential pain of social rejection and the complexity of relations between the sexes, you have a volatile situation in which confusing feelings can arise. In the matrix of youthful anxieties, the idea may emerge that one's problem is a discrepancy between feelings and biology. Embracing a new sexual identity may seem to be the exodus path out of misery!

Thirdly, the church cannot condone cross-dressing, hormone therapy, and surgery as the solution for confused feelings. When there is a disjunction between biology and the mind, the solution is not to change the body and our dress but rather to seek the changing of the mind! Our body is a biological given. Our minds, in contrast, can be changed by the grace and Spirit of God. Old patterns of thinking can give way to those made new by the power of the gospel. Feelings once considered permanent can be overcome by healthier feelings more in line with creation and redemption.

Not iSex but iChrist

In short, the church must urge all its members to live not by what we naturally are but rather by grace. We must be reminded constantly that our sexual feelings do not define us. As Christians, we must reject the iSex world and embrace in its place the iChrist reality set forth in the gospel. We are defined by our relationship to Christ and so we are to live by the power

and grace which is promised to those planted in him. Living a Christ-conformed life is not easy. It is a process which takes effort and time, and it necessitates daily self-denial. This is true for every believer and not only those with unique challenges such as transgender feelings.


Biologically speaking, there is no such thing as a girl trapped in a boy's body or a man trapped in a woman's body. Framing human unrest in this way is an understandable but incorrect diagnosis of the problem which, if accepted, closes the door to hopeful change. We are trapped not by biology but by the depravity of sin and only the gospel can resolve the inner tensions created in our lives by the fall. Instead of hormones and the knife of a surgeon, those who experience transgender feelings need the transforming power of the gospel and the severe surgery of the Holy Spirit who makes us new in Christ.

A few helpful books

Vaughan Roberts has written a helpful primer on the topic. His booklet is entitled *Transgender* and was published by the Good Book Company in 2016. It is from him that I borrowed the iWorld terminology. In seventy-five pages, he covers in satisfying depth the issue of transgender. He begins with salient observations about our culture and then examines the topic from the perspective of creation, fall, and rescue. The last chapter is entitled "Wisdom," and seeks to apply the gospel to various situations that might arise in a Christian family or church community including what to do when you have a child expressing transgender feelings. A very readable and recommended resource.

Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock co-authored a book entitled *What Does the Bible Teach about Transgenderism* (Christian Focus Publications, 2020). This is also a short book (105 pages), but is a slightly more challenging read than that of Roberts. The writers begin with a lengthy discussion of what the Bible teaches on gender and identity. Pages 27-30 contain an interesting exposition of the enduring message of Deuteronomy

22:5, which prohibits cross-dressing. Overall, the authors do a good job in setting forth the binary nature of the sexes as created by God. Chapter 2 discusses "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood." The authors argue that resisting transgender ideology can only be effective when the church recommits to specific understandings of masculinity and femininity in the church, in the family and in society. Lacking these, they reason, we will have nothing to say to the spirit of the age. Chapter 3, in my estimation, is the best part of the book. Here the authors develop teaching about our new life in Christ. This section would be very encouraging to adult Christians struggling with transgender feelings!

Lastly, we can mention *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* by Nancy R. Pearcey (Baker Books, 2008). This is a great book, which exposes the deeply flawed thinking of the secular narrative about transgender and other moral issues such as homosexual conduct, euthanasia, and abortion. Pearcey shows that, in all these areas, secularists operate with a mind/body dualism which does not reflect the inherent message of the human body. For secularists, the body is only an instrument of the mind, a stage on which to enact our mental constructs. In contrast, Pearcey pleads for a unified view of body and mind in which the message of our physiology would be taken seriously. Instead of commandeering our bodies to fulfill our mental constructs, wisdom dictates that our biology must be respected. Only in this way can we find our authentic selves. With many powerful stories and detailed research, this book is close to being an essential read for Christians. I would say it is in the top ten most important books I have read in the last five years. 



Rob Schouten Minister
Canadian Reformed Church
Aldergrove, British Columbia
robert.a.schouten@protonmail.com

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—“Declaring the Whole Counsel of God”



Food Aid to Needy Churches

over shortwave radio several times each week. Some of these programs are also available online. The good news of Christ is reaching cities, towns and rural communities in the three most widely-spoken Ethiopian languages: Amharic (about 30%), Oromo (about 34%) and Somali (about 6%).

Christian Literature

About a year ago, *Duties of Parents* by JC Ryle was translated and printed in both Amharic and Oromo. It has been well received. In God's providence, the pandemic lockdown has resulted in more time to translate solid Christian literature. Now many more

books are in final review in preparation for publication in Amharic, Oromo and/or Somali. *Healthy Christian Growth* by Sinclair Ferguson is now being printed in each of these languages.

Biblical Training

Coronavirus lockdown around the world has activated the Augustine Program online. This gave more time for the preparation of a variety of biblical training materials. These have been sent electronically for immediate use in Ethiopia. This includes written Bible study notes on the Gospel of Luke and the Pastoral epistles. A teaching PowerPoint on Galatians and a video presentation for the book of Hebrews have been developed.

Training Events

Some easing up of COVID measures in the past few months has enabled MERF's Ethiopian team leaders to travel both north and south of the capital,

Addis Ababa, to hold short biblical training events for churches in outlying communities. Two-day youth leader training events were held in churches at: Chancho, Muka Turi and Hawassa. A three-day training course was held on spiritual growth and maturity at Bulbula Mecafara. Currently, in the Addis Ababa area, a Discipleship Training program is held every Friday. Around 36 pastors attend. As well as teaching Bible study skills, these events provide opportunities to distribute sound literature. *Pray for these Ethiopian church leaders to continue to grow and be strengthened in God's Word.*

Somali Churches

Somali believers, families and churches are few and usually keep a low profile in the Somali-speaking region of Ethiopia, to the far east of the country. Like neighboring Somalia, the community is predominantly Muslim. The hardships of this year have resulted in the scattering of Somali Christians to differ-

"Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word."

— Psalm 119:73-74

ent towns and villages. *Pray especially for believers to be able to gather together again for worship, fellowship and to be built up in Christ.*

We give thanks for the growth of the Ethiopian church. MERF's faithful Ethiopian team actively prepare gospel radio broadcasts, translate, print and distribute Christian literature, travel long distances to train church leaders and minister to diaconal needs. *Pray for their encouragement and protection. It is a delight to partner with such faithful workers in gospel ministry.*

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.merf.org/support



Zemen is MERF's Team Leader

Rob de Haan

Robert de Haan was born the youngest of eight siblings. He has five brothers and two sisters. Rob's parents and an older brother have passed away. He has family living in Grand Rapids and Bow Washington, U.S.A. and in Grimsby, Burlington, Brampton, Brighton, and Barrie. Rob is non-verbal but is able to make himself understood with expressions and actions unique to him. He has also learned some sign language. He loves music and animals, and is happy to quietly sit and listen to music. Through the Passport Program staff takes him to River's Edge and he thoroughly enjoys the contact he has with the animals there.

Rob is a man of order. He likes things organized and in their place - or in the garbage. He will clean up or take away dishes from the other residents or visitors to Anchor Home in order to tidy up.

Rob's parents searched long and hard for a placement for Rob when they were no longer able to care for him at home. Rob's family is so very thankful to our heavenly Father for the loving care he gets at Anchor Home where he has lived now since November of 1995. Anchor is his home, and he is content and happy to be living there.

Written by Rob's sister

May Birthdays

1 Clarence Zwiep will be **67**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

4 Debbie Veenstra will be **47**

4238 2nd Concession Road
Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10 Rob de Haan will be **56**

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

21 Eddie Van Rootselaar will be **28**

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

30 Bernie De Vos will be **46**

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

30 Shaelyn Kottlengen will be **25**

c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR #3
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

*Happy Birthday to all of you
celebrating a birthday in May! We
wish you all the Lord's blessing in
the year ahead. May you all continue
to strive to serve the Lord, and
find your comfort and joy in him.*

Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized
in the Reformed confessions, Clarion
adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
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In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living