

Christian Institute Briefing

Transsexualism – mind over matter

What is a transsexual?

Transsexuals are men or women who are biologically normal, but who believe themselves to be members of the opposite sex.¹ This feeling of being ‘trapped in the wrong body’ may lead to a transsexual demanding what is often called a ‘sex change’ (also known as ‘gender reassignment’). This involves the use of hormones and surgery to change their appearance and sexual characteristics.

These medical and surgical possibilities now make people believe they can ‘change sex’ and created the idea of ‘transsexuals’ or people claiming to be ‘trapped in the wrong body’.² The word ‘transsexual’ only arose in the 1940s.

Seeking the wrong answer

The problem, however, is psychological: the evidence supports this view overwhelmingly.³ The transsexual’s body is healthy. Traditionally invasive surgery has only been used to preserve the integrity of a body endangered by disease or injury⁴, not to mutilate a healthy body. A painful operation cannot solve the mental dysfunction.

The key issue

Gender reassignment only changes the outside, not the inside. In fact it is not possible to change sex. It is helpful to distinguish between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. There are two distinct sexes: male and female. Gender, however, can be thought of differently: there is a range stretching from masculinity to femininity. Such a variation in characteristics from person to person is quite obvious.

People are born either male or female. It does not make sense to say ‘I have the right to change sex’. It cannot be done. It would be like Parliament passing an Act to decree that all pregnancies in future will be by men not women.

The Bible

The reason that there are two, and only two, sexes is that God created mankind such that to be human means to be either human male or human female (Genesis 1:27). The human body is therefore a good gift of God and essential to the human person. But the transsexual sees their body as an accident, as denying their ‘true self’ which resides in their mind and emotions. This is opposed to the Bible, which teaches a positive view of the body: the supreme expression of this being that Jesus became flesh (John 1:14). It is an old heresy (‘Manichaeism’) which detaches the person from the body.⁵

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 warns against ‘sinning sexually against your own body’. Christians must honour God with their body.

The Old Testament uses the same word to condemn homosexual practice and intentional cross-dressing. Deuteronomy 22:5 states: “A woman must not wear man’s clothing, nor a man wear woman’s clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this.” (compare Leviticus 18:22).

What about the law?

In July 2002 the European Court of Human Rights held that a transsexual has the human right to change sex and to marry someone of the same biological sex.⁶ But until now British law has been in harmony with Christian belief. In the court case *Corbett v Corbett*, Mr. Corbett argued that his marriage was void because his ‘wife’ was a man. Mr. Justice Ormrod agreed. He upheld the principle that biology determines the sex.⁷ A male-female transsexual who had undergone ‘gender reassignment’ remained as he was ever since birth: male. Ormrod upheld that three facts determined the sex of a person:

1. The chromosomes (XY – male; XX – female)
2. The gonads (testes/ovaries)
3. The genitals (penis/clitoris, including internal sex organs)

Ormrod also held that the man was psychologically a transsexual.

Gay marriage

In *Corbett v Corbett* the marriage of a transsexual male-female to a male was declared void because both parties were biological males.

The Gender Recognition Bill, introduced in Parliament in November 2003, allows transsexuals to marry. It does this by allowing them to swap the sex

recorded on their birth certificate. But this is fundamentally dishonest. You cannot alter a fact of history. If the Bill becomes law, it will open the door to gay marriage. Transsexual marriage is gay marriage since legally two men, or two women, of the same sex would be married.

The arguments

There are claims that a person's sex is the product of a gradual process determined by society. This is clearly opposed to Scripture. The objective fact is that the XY or XX chromosomal/genetic pattern is set at conception. Nor is it reasonable to assume that other biological factors, e.g. brain structure, cause transsexualism. There is little evidence for this and the plea 'I was made this way' was abandoned by biologists long ago.⁸

Even if psychology were a factor in determining sex, why should it overrule all other factors?

What transsexualism is not:⁹

1. *Transvestism*. A transvestite is someone who cross-dresses for erotic stimulation, usually a man who dresses as a woman.¹⁰ This is not the reason why a transsexual would dress as the opposite sex.
2. *Homosexuality*. A homosexual wants to fulfil same-sex desires with their body as given. They do not see their body as a problem.
3. *A biological 'intersex' condition, also called 'hermaphroditism'*. There are very rare cases of babies whose sex at birth is ambiguous. True hermaphrodites are born with both testicular and ovarian tissue. One world-wide review found only 364 cases of true hermaphrodites since 1899.¹¹ Another intersex condition, involving ambiguous genitalia, is thought to occur in 1 in 130,000 births.¹² Such illnesses have nothing to do with transsexualism. A transsexual has a healthy body.

Problems for transsexuals

There is evidence that some transsexuals attempt suicide, become involved in prostitution and that some transsexuals regret having their operation: even 'returning' to their biological sex.¹³ It has also been claimed that hormonal treatment can result in breast cancer.¹⁴

The Christian response to a transsexual, as with any other person, should be prayer, care and counsel as for any with psychological difficulties and where necessary repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:21)

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- ¹ 'Transsexualism' in Atkinson, D J and Field, D H (Eds.) *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, IVP, 1995, page 863. It is a rare condition. The American Psychiatric Association has estimated that 1 in 30,000 males (0.003 per cent) and 1 in 100,000 females (0.001 per cent) are transsexuals: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Third Edition – Revised)*, The American Psychiatric Association, 1987, page 75. More recent studies have shown a higher prevalence, but there is no reason to believe they are more accurate: see *Transsexuality- a report by the Evangelical Alliance Policy Commission*, 2000, page 16.
- ² *Transsexuality*, *Op cit*, page 12. The idea is distinct from cross-dressing.
- ³ *Ibid*, page 22
- ⁴ O'Donovan, O, *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage*, Grove Booklet on Ethics, 1982, page 15
- ⁵ *Ibid*, page 6
- ⁶ *Goodwin v. United Kingdom and I. V United Kingdom* (2002) 35 EHRR 447; *The Times*, 12 July 2002
- ⁷ *Corbett v Corbett (otherwise Ashley)* [1970] 2 All ER 33
- ⁸ Whitehead, N, 'Are Transsexuals Born that Way?', *Triple Helix*, Autumn 2000, Christian Medical Fellowship, page 7
- ⁹ 'Transsexualism' in Atkinson, D J and Field, D H (Eds.), *Op cit*, page 864
- ¹⁰ *Transsexuality*, *Op cit*, page 6
- ¹¹ van Niekirk, W A, 'True Hermaphroditism', *Am. J. Obstet. Gynecol.*, 126(7), 1976, pages 890-907
- ¹² 'Partial androgen insensitivity syndrome': see <http://www.isna.org/faq/frequency.html> as at 14 February 2002
- ¹³ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, *Op cit*, page 75; O'Donovan, O, *Op cit*, page 4; Califia, P, *Sex Changes- The Politics of Transgenderism*, Cleis Press, 1997, page 246; Whitehead, N, *Op cit*, pages 6-8
- ¹⁴ MacKenzie, G O, *Transgender Nation*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994, page 71 citing Prior J, Vigna, Y and Watson, D in 'Spironolactone with Psychological Female Steroids for Presurgical Therapy of Male-to-Female Transsexuals', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 18(1), 1989, pages 49-57