

What to say to about Exclusive Interpretations of the Teaching in the Bible on Gender and Sex

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The source of the condemnation of gender and sexually variant behaviour by many Christian people comes from an exclusive reliance on bible texts. My response to one such approach was to ask: Do you not consider that there are two accounts of Genesis where all humanity was created? In Genesis 1:26-27 God said, *“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*. In the second creation story in Genesis 2, Eve was made from Adam's rib (.....rather than forming humans together on the sixth day as in Genesis 1). One might argue from this, that Adam was both male and female at first.

Genesis 2 21-23 says: *“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man”*. Genesis 5:2 also states: *“He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created”*.

In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus states: *“Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”* Mark repeats this in equivalent terms; (Mark 10:6-9). Further statements on marriage are found in Matthew 19:9, Mark 10:11-12, and in Luke 16:18. In Galatians 3:28 Paul says; *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-33, models the Christian married life. That approach is also endorsed in 1 Peter 3:1-6 and Hebrews 13:4-7. All of these statements in the Bible should be rightly and unconditionally supported, but all are in praise of marriage. Every statement describes humankind as being male and female, not male or female. No gender is separated from the other, and there is nothing in these statements which condemn any other form of loving, committed and faithful cross-gender, same-sex relationship or sexual acts.

All sexual abuse, most notably same-sex abuse, was virulently and rightly condemned in the first century despotic and gender unequal societies, where the abuses of power gave permission for the extreme abuses of gender and sex. Indeed the purpose of the specific prohibition in Leviticus 18:22

¹ Personal Biography <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/SusanBiographyPapers.pdf>

² Gilchrist, S. (2017): *“What to say to about Exclusive Interpretations of the Teaching in the Bible on Gender and Sex”*: <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/028B-WhatToSayAboutExclusiveInterpretations.pdf>

and 20:33 was to condemn abuses of power, rather than the sexual act³. Paul rightly condemns same-sex abuses, but he chooses his words carefully to refer a first century reader back to the Leviticus texts. In the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15), apart for the prohibition on eating food offered to idols, fornication is the only prohibited act. A silence however reigns in the teaching of Jesus, Paul and in the New Testament when one looks for the condemnation of any loving faithful and committed heterosexual, cross-gender or same-sex relationship or act.

Attempts to prove that these Biblical statements and decrees which extol the sacrament of marriage automatically condemn all other types of relationships do not work, because no such exclusions between male and female are ever provided. In Acts 8:26-40 it was a eunuch who was charged with taking the Christian message to the world. No matter how high their rank and ability, eunuchs were reviled and regarded as social and sexual outcasts inside Roman and other first century societies. That action also associated the early Church with the gender challenging behaviour of the Greek and Roman Goddess cults which protected the underclasses against the powerful in society and attacked the male dominance which gave permission for the abuses of sex⁴.

From the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels which had attacked without compromise the abuses and hypocrisy of the Jewish authorities Peter and Paul, in the epistles and letters, demanded that the Roman authorities were given respect. Jesus and early Christianity did not simply insist on care, compassion, consideration and respect for women. It made itself belong to women by right. Instead of simply supporting them Christianity challenged the male patriarchy by identifying with their demands and the disappearance of that ownership is one measure of what has been lost in the search for the respectability of the Church. By the end of the first century, Christians were expected to conform to the male and female stereotypes demanded by Roman society in matters of gender and sex.

Because of this transformation the present day doctrines on gender complementarity and gender and sexual variation arise instead through the adaptations that were needed for Christianity to survive in socially and gender unequal societies. This is through enforcing the divisions between male and female demanded by Roman society, from the development of Church tradition and changes in the theology of the Church. The same paradigm shift has occurred in relation to same-sex intercourse, where the first century condemnations of same-sex intercourse, which were based on the abuses of power, purpose and hospitality in these socially and gender unequal first century societies have been turned into the unvarying condemnation of the sexual act, and all references to the sexual abuse which arose from the gross abuses of power in socially and gender unequal societies have been written out of the present day Christian teaching which relates to gender and sex.

It is important to note that discrimination against gender and sexually variant people is a socially led phenomenon and it would be a mistake to identify its cause with religious belief. A major feature of gender complementarity comes from the way it separates the male from the female roles. Any form of gender and sexually variant behaviour which departs from the normal expectations of that society, for any purpose, challenges this distinction and may be a danger to the social order. The need to seek respectability and acceptance in Roman society was considered essential if Christianity was to continue to survive and bring its Gospel message to the world. However the

³ For reasons see: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus*": <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf>

⁴ That is contrary to the Christian attitudes which perceive the Goddess Cults to be purely depositories of depravity and abusive sex. For more information on these relationships see: Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation on the Life and Teaching of Jesus*": <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/219P-InfluencesJesus.pdf> and Gilchrist, S. (2016): "*Influences of Gender and Sexual Variation in the History and Traditions of the Christian Church*": <http://www.tqdr.co.uk/documents/220P-InfluencesChurch.pdf>

compromises which this demanded sacrificed the radical teaching of Jesus on gender and sexuality for the respectability of the Church. That transformation brought the Church to collude with these secular demands of society rather than to challenge them. Not only has this consent reinforced the secular prejudices of such discriminatory societies; it gave and it still gives religious legitimacy to them, it reinforces the severity of the penalties that are encountered and it contradicts the results which the present day scientific consensus, it discounts the experiences of being able to meet gender and sexually variant people and it rejects the neurophysiological and psychological analysis undertaken by this author. One only needs to look today at the behaviour of Daesh and Boko Haram to see how extreme this can become. The persecution and slaughter of gender and sexually variant people, not only in Christianity but in Islam, Judaism and all other religions, states and cultures which have drawn their teachings from it has been enormous.

This is not an attack on the bible itself. The traditional teaching on homosexuality and on gender and sexually variant behaviour is encapsulated in Article 2357 of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church which condemns all such behaviour as disordered lifestyle choices that always pursue the desire for inappropriate sex. This traditional viewpoint is contradicted by a worldwide consensus, endorsed by the great majority of professional institutions, the lived encounters with gender and sexually variant people, and this author's research which currently regard both gender and sexually variant identities and behaviour as being naturally expected variations of the human condition which are intrinsic to the personality created, that arise very early in development, and which cannot be changed by the individual concerned or by the actions of others in subsequent life. This is about the ability to be oneself, not the desire for sex. Therefore a moral duality must exist whereby transgender people and other gender and sexually variant people who express their true attractions and identities while conforming to the highest standards of their societies should be highly regarded. Those engaged in misuse may be severely condemned for their acts.

There is no doubt that there was a great deal of sexual abuse in first century society, where the blatant abuses of power gave permission for extreme abuses of sex. In the United States at the present time, senior members of the Catholic Church have been using its traditional teaching to collude with the conservative Christian right when they deny the legitimacy of transgender people's identities and condemn all transgender people as invariably being in pursuit of illicit or depraved sex. In many African countries extreme penalties against homosexual behaviour are being advocated or applied. These concerns are compounded by the political changes that have recently taken place. However to condemn all gender and sexually variant behaviour for the abuses of some, is akin to saying today that all members of a minority community are terrorists because some engage in terrorist acts. That is the same form of tribal scapegoating which condemns people because of the colour of their skin. For both social and theological reasons there is now an urgent need to reconsider the traditional teaching of the Church. In Acts 8:26-40 it was the eunuch who was charged with taking the Christian message to the world. No matter how high their rank and ability, eunuchs were reviled and regarded as social and sexual outcasts inside Roman and other first century societies. For its mission, Christianity needs its modern day eunuchs, in the form of gender and sexually variant people, which includes all transgender, transsexual, lesbian, gay, heterosexual and bisexual people who attempt to live their lives in ways that fulfil the love of Christ, and who seek to express their own identities within roles that are true to themselves, to take the Gospel message to the world.

This may be a major challenge to church traditions. It may be costly in societies where strong gender discrimination and social division exists. When Paul stated in Galatians 3: 26-28: "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*". No qualification is imposed in this

statement and in his use of the term male and female he was using the same inclusive terminology that is present in all of the Old Testament and New Testament bible texts. It follows from the arguments presented in this document that identical criteria in relation to use and abuse should be applied to heterosexual and same-sex acts of sex. There is no diminution of moral standards and no condonation of abusive sex. Instead of centuries of making homosexuality the scapegoat for all sexual abuse it is demonstrated that the correct issue for the Christian Church should be one of combatting all forms of abusive sex. Those who reject Christianity or who are outside its boundaries, do not judge the Christian Church in terms of its own doctrines: they judge it in terms of the tribal discrimination they see within it: and the refusal of the Christian Church to address these issues is destroying the credibility of Christianity in the present day world.

The early Christian Church described the moral duality which is identified in this analysis in terms of "The Way of Darkness" and "The Way of Light". The same early Church set out to be a beacon of light, shining out to the hostile and discriminatory society around it. However the Gospel message which demanded true equality and fairness for all people did not last. One might argue that this light was extinguished for sexually and gender variant people by the transformation of the Gospel message into doctrines which looked for respectability, authority and continuity inside the gender discriminatory and socially unequal societies that surrounded the Church. In a Christian Church which lives true to the vision of the New Covenant; all behaviour should be governed by purity of intention, and all people must be accepted in their own right. There is no reduction in any form the rightful condemnation of the way of darkness. There is no condonation of abusive acts. Instead it identifies the way of light for all gender and sexually variant people who seek to live their lives in ways that are true to their own identities in the Love of Christ. That light will shine most strongly in places where there are discriminatory societies around it. Whatever the cost to the organisation may be, surely the mission of every Church today must be to rekindle this beacon of light.

Any viewpoint which fails to understand the bible in the context in which it was written, does not do justice to the text. Jesus put in place a revolution that did not lead to violent revolt. Peter, Paul and the early Church had to do the same in Roman Society, if they were to succeed in taking the Gospel message to the world. Paul's letter to Philemon suggests that the early Christian community sought to express the Gospel message in full within its own social boundaries, while adjusting to the demands that society made outside it. For a powerless organisation in powerful societies that is a practical approach. That was also recognised in the teaching of Jesus. Instead of implementing the Gospel message in full once it had obtained the power to do so, the adaptations that were needed for the Church first to survive, and then to exert power and domination in a socially and gender unequal society have been turned into the doctrine itself.

These are not arguments which seek to adapt or distort Christian teaching and the Gospel message; instead they are arguments which attempt to return to the true meaning of the Bible texts. That demands a re-examination of the traditional doctrines, however Pope Francis has declared that there can be no possibility of change to the traditional teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church of England is currently trying to produce a new teaching document which demands a re-examination of its traditional doctrines on homosexuality and on gender and sexually variant behaviour "*As the Church of England has received it*" in which any future consideration to that of: "*Interpreting the existing law and guidance to permit maximum freedom within it, without changes to the law, or the doctrine of the Church*". Conservative groups, such as GAFCON, who claim that the Church teaching has never changed, do not succeed in returning to the Gospel message. Instead they return to a Christianity which has been set by the needs of the 13th century Church. The leaders of most of the 39 provinces of the Anglican Communion have begun arriving in England ahead of a Primates' Meeting, which takes place at Canterbury Cathedral from the 2nd October 2017. These are some of the issues that should be confronting them: not least a consideration of the traditional doctrines and changes in the theology of the Church. Their failure to give these the

full and proper consideration will continue to promote the abuses, which the traditional Christian teaching on gender and sexual variation has created for centuries and if unchanged, will continue to destroy the credibility of religions in the World.

Additional reading:

- Gilchrist, S. (2017f): "Condemning Sexual Abuse and Welcoming Gender and Sexually Variant People into the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/237P-ChangesInChurch.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "Gender and Sexual Malpractice and Abuse in the Christian Church" Briefing Paper for the Church of England General Synod Meeting, July 2017: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/236P-Malpractice.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "No, Pope Francis: Gender Identity is not a Choice": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/227P-No-PopeFrancis.pdf>.
- Gilchrist, S. (2017): "A House Built on Sand? Attitudes to Gender and Sexual Variant Identities and Behaviour in Christianity and the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/231P-HouseUponSand.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Sex and Gender Variation in the Christian Church: Is it Not Time to Consider the Science?": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/226P-ConsiderScience.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Science and Belief. A New Approach to Identity and Personality Formation in Early Life": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/218P-PaperPersonality.pdf>
- Gilchrist, S. (2016): "Taking a Different Path": Chapter 10 in: "This Is My Body: Hearing the Theology of Transgender Christians", Ed: Beardsley, T. and O'Brien, M: Darton Longman and Todd. May 2016: ISBN 978-0-232-53206-7.
- Gilchrist, S. (2015): "Deuteronomy 22:5 and its Impact on Gender and Sexual Variation in the Christian Church": <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/documents/022B-Deuteronomy22-5.pdf>

References to all sources are given in the detailed papers

A full bibliography is also available via: <http://www.tgdr.co.uk/articles/index.htm>

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