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***INTRODUCTION:  
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE  
TO THE  
CROSSDRESSER AND TRANSSEXUAL***

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Originally published in January, 1994 by Grove Press  
as  
*Changing Channels?*

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Edited 2000 by Julie and David to remove one or two original mistakes and make it more open for an American readership

*By the Grace of God*

***BECAUSE OF WHAT I AM***

*It's strange, Lord,  
but I never thought  
that I should finish up  
being thankful for what I am.  
I am thankful, Lord  
because I realize  
that rather than  
not being able to serve You  
because of what I am;  
because of what I am  
I can serve you in a unique way!*

from '*Prayers from the both of Me*' by Jan Goddard (publisher unknown)

## *1. ALL DRESSED UP*

If I take a walk in a certain part of my parish in the early evening I am likely to see a man walking his dog, dressed in a mini-skirt, and wearing heavy makeup. He is a crossdresser, living as a woman, despite the ridicule of children and the raised eyebrows of adults.

We humans often fear the different and unknown. Hence the anxiety aroused by such a sight. In this case this has lessened over time. The man changed over after losing his wife, and was already known in the community. So compassion and familiarity means that for the most part he is left alone, a not uncommon fate of the elderly crossdresser. But why should he have this compulsion?

Most of us cannot understand a man who so enjoys portraying the feminine, and so we dismiss such people to the hounding of certain parts of the press. We assume them to be sick, or worse. And since one difference may be accompanied by others, occasionally that judgement is correct.

But we cannot stop here. All sorts of behavior that is now socially acceptable has been the subject of ridicule and persecution in the past. We don't find it unnatural to educate women to the same standard as men, and we don't try to cure left-handedness. Our hostility may also add to the problem: the crossdresser may resort to drink to numb his inner turmoil; a male-to-female transsexual may become a prostitute because she cannot keep another job without having to lie about her background.

So if we are to handle this problem as a society, and if the churches are to be able to help and guide, then the first thing we need is some basic knowledge.

### *THE CROSSDRESSER*

A crossdresser is someone who dresses in the clothes of the opposite sex. However, this label is not always appropriate. The husband who wears a frilly apron for house cleaning, or the outdoor worker adding a pair of tights under his jeans to keep his legs warm in cold weather, are presumably not crossdressers in any real sense. Again, most women in our society wear either masculine styles, or genuinely male clothing at some point. So it seems reasonable to exclude those who cross-dress for an everyday purpose – fashion, practicality, or fancy dress. This last group is perhaps more open to

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doubt as to why they dress in this way. But most female impersonators, to take the extreme case, deny strongly that they are doing more than earning a living.

Because my contact with homosexuals has been negligible, I am also excluding the 'drag-queen' and the homosexual prostitute, although they are often described as crossdressers in newspaper reports. For most such people I see the crossdressing more as a means than as an end in itself. Sexual orientation for compulsive crossdressers usually seems to be heterosexual.

So, the 'crossdresser' that I know is likely to be a man who, from an early age, often pre-teen, has dressed up as opportunity arose, and been unable to stop. Many children dress up in childhood, but for some it has an inescapable significance, and it is likely to be a lasting condition. At the Manchester Conference I attended, one organizer of a nationwide group told me that she only knew of one crossdresser who had permanently stopped 'dressing'. 'She' was 96!

### ***APPEARANCE***

The appearance of many crossdressers is often only a travesty of womanhood, leading to revulsion when seen. This may be due to partial dressing, or excessive or non-existent make-up. Equally, the solitary crossdresser may not realize how grotesque he appears to an observer, and without help he may never attain even basic skills in creating a feminine image, simply because he is deceiving himself into seeing an unreal beauty via his imagination.

The source of clothes is another problem. A wife's clothes may be used even where they are the wrong size and, of course, shape; cast-offs are obtained from resale shops; or items bought via mail order. In such cases the most accessible suppliers may well be those selling 'glamour' clothes via tabloid advertising. Of course, if there is a strong sexual element the choice of clothing may be made deliberately to produce arousal. Equally, there may be a decision that if the object is to adopt a different guise, then it might as well be very different!

There is sometimes the opposite problem. A member of one of the larger groups will be able to get advice on appearance, style, voice, deportment, and make-up, often from professionals who genuinely wish to help, or who enjoy the challenge. As a result, some crossdressers can produce an extremely convincing feminine image. (The transsexual will receive professional help in any case, as part of the process of changing roles.)

In between the many who create a poor appearance, and the few with a high degree of skill, are a sizeable group who make a good enough effort to pass casual inspection, often supported by wives who help their partner out of self-preservation, or because they can genuinely enjoy the artistic or shared effort involved.

### **WHO ARE THEY?**

Since women's cross-dressing is now respectable, only men are usually classed as crossdressers. They may have any background – company president to laborer. Being a crossdresser is not related to shape. Information provided by the readership of the American magazine, *Transgender Tapestry*, gave heights from 5 feet 2 inches to 6 feet 7 inches, and builds from slim to barrel. Research suggests that many crossdressers are creative and highly intelligent, although others are of lesser ability. Many entering the gender sub-culture do so in their forties, or perhaps somewhat younger these days, but most have been crossdressing since their teens or earlier. There are a very large number of crossdressers. For example, a survey of 5,000 men for *Woman* magazine a few years ago suggests that a quarter of all men will crossdress at some time, and up to 8% will dress regularly, with several percent finding it compulsive. This may say something about men who reply to such a survey! But a doctor who specializes in this field, speaking on television in early 1992, stated that about one and a quarter percent of men cross-dress regularly (thus about 300,000 in the UK, and 2 million in the U.S., although even higher estimates have been offered).

Local support groups also have evidence to suggest this is a widespread activity. For example, I was told of one crossdresser in a Cornish village in England who received over 70 replies to an advertisement run in the local paper. Either such groups happen to be in places where crossdressers cluster, or else this level exists everywhere.

### **OPENLY DIFFERENT**

Few crossdressers, however, are open about their behavior. The Beaumont Society in England, which is a national organization for crossdressers and also some transsexuals, has existed for over 25 years, but only has membership numbers moving into the 5,000 range. Other groups are smaller, although there are a lot of them. Roses Club, founded in 1989, now has over 3,000 members (in 2000), due perhaps to style and a higher profile. In the United States and Canada, there are dozens of groups scattered throughout. One national group, the *Society for Second Self*, or *Tri-Ess*, has dozens of local chapters. Another national organization, the *International Foundation for*

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*Gender Education*, has thousands of names on their confidential mailing list. The Chicago, Illinois area alone boasts no fewer than four groups!

Thus crossdressing remains a hidden problem. Guilt and public hostility makes coming out into the open unlikely, and even where this happens, the use of women's names, although part of assuming a feminine identity, is also a good security measure: 'Susan' from Chicago will not be easy to identify. So someone seeking help or information may find it very difficult to locate anyone who knows anything about the subject. Fear of exposure is usually acute. Those who staff the telephone help lines report many instances where the caller is too frightened to speak, or whose fear is crippling in its intensity.

### ***IS CROSSDRESSING ABOUT SEX?***

People generally associate crossdressing with sex, but mature crossdressers emphasize that it is gender-oriented. It is the female social role that attracts. Certainly meetings I have been to have been as decorous as the WI or Mothers' Union in England.

One newspaper series, *Sex in the 90's*, found that 3% of men cross-dress regularly, and another 3% on occasion (and that 4% of women also cross-dress, mostly occasionally). Given the context, this implies a sexual element.

Most crossdressers only dress up in part at first, often wearing items like underwear or high heels and stockings. For them such clothing provides a sexual fetish. In time they often move on to more and more complete dressing. If they do, then the sexual element may well diminish or disappear. There could be an age factor here: for those who started crossdressing in their teens the sexual element may remain stronger. Some women do seem to find transvestism arousing and this may lead to sex while 'dressed'. But a wife may well not know, even after years of married life. A survey in America reported that seven out of ten married crossdressers had not told their wives. For most crossdressers any related sexual activity will thus be turned in on themselves and expressed in masturbation.

Virtually all crossdressers do seem to have a period in which sexual expression is very much part of their preoccupation, particularly during puberty. But a concern with their sexuality is something that is true of all teenagers. So the attraction of transvestism itself may not be particularly sexual. Most crossdressers speak of the freedom they feel: the release of tension, the chance in some way to express a hidden part of their personality, to be able to pur-

sue beauty. From some, particularly those who have made the greatest efforts to cover up, often by going into military or police, or some other 'macho' occupation, the change when 'dressed' can be dramatic.

The compulsion will also vary over time. Many crossdressers marry with the conviction that the real relationship will overcome the unreal, and feel even more guilty when this does not happen. Indeed temptation in the form of the wife's clothes may make 'dressing' more likely. The arrival of children may limit opportunity, and so the forties is another period when crossdressing may come to the fore. This is also the age when men may give thought to their lifestyle. Such behavior may also appear after retirement, or the death of a spouse.

### ***IS IT NEW?***

Crossdressing has a very long history. It was known to Hippocrates, Herodotus, and other ancient writers. There are records of men who crossdressed, from James I of England, and Henri III of France, to commoners (and it has been suggested that some 'witches' were reclusive crossdressers). But it is not always clear what is being recorded. The *Beaumont Society* in England, for example, is named after an eighteenth century French nobleman who carried out diplomatic and spying missions masquerading as a woman, and who later retired to England where he continued to live as a woman. Was he an impersonator, a transsexual, or a crossdresser? And what of the various women, from Joan of Arc (who maintained that cross-dressing was God's will for her) to recent times, who have masqueraded as soldiers or sailors. Indeed, up to the 1950s the main concern over 'masquerading' was with women.

Such 'different' people are also found in many other cultures. There are particular roles for them in India, and in Japanese theater. They form a sub-culture in Thailand, where hundreds take part in 'beauty contests' to win a coveted place in one of the tourist cabarets. Up to one in five families in Samoa may have *fa'afafine* sons living as women, and with an honored role in both church and society. *Amnesty International* has intervened in cases of persecution in Turkey. North American Indian Tribes gave varying status to such *berdache*. At best, they could be consulted as sources of wisdom because they were in touch with both their masculine and feminine sides. At worst, they became subject to the same sort of punishment for 'antisocial behavior' such people have suffered in some totalitarian states. So why do such people exist?

### **WHY?**

Early research, from the 1880s up to the late 1950s, failed to find evidence of physical or hormone abnormalities. This gave rise to theories that the home environment was to 'blame'. A favored explanation was that the boy was kept too long in baby dresses. This went out of fashion as a result of cultural comparison and when it was noted that baby fashions had changed without any apparent effect on numbers. Transvestism, or 'Eonism' was classed as a perversion. In theory this was a technical term with no moral content. Unfortunately transvestism was often viewed as linked to other personality problems. This led to some extremely unpleasant treatments: aversion therapy, for example, was used in an attempt to condition the patient into rejecting his behavior.

Since treatment did not seem to work, the field was thrown open to a range of social explanations. Although the pernicious influence of a woman remained a common explanation, weak, absent, or overbearing fathers were also advanced as possibilities.

Another approach was to suggest that the crossdresser, finding girls and women threatening, constructed an easily controlled substitute woman within himself as a 'transitional object'. Again, it has been suggested that the crossdresser may not have fully separated his self-image from that of his mother at an early stage of his growth.

But while some of these ideas might apply to particular individuals none could be 'the' cause: for every mechanism there were many to whom it was irrelevant, and many more for whom the stimulus did not lead to crossdressing or any other kind of unusual behavior.

### **BACK TO NATURE**

Recently there has been a new attempt to grapple with the differences between men and women as physically rather than socially determined. The new *Brain Sex* theory is simple in outline. Thus there is a general medical acceptance that a foetus will develop into a female unless there is a Y-chromosome present. Where this is present it triggers the production of hormones in the adrenal glands about six weeks after conception. These in turn set loose the more powerful hormones which lead to the development of male organs and the atrophy of the nascent female ones. The hypothalamus, which is believed to be the part of the brain that is important in sexual orientation, is changed over, as is the general organization of the hemispheres of the

brain into male instead of female patterns, which affect spatial perception, linguistic skills and the like.

Because the levels of hormone needed are relatively low, it is suggested that small changes in these levels, induced for example by stress in the mother's environment, can affect the transformation. Stress is already known to produce steroids which inhibit hormone production. Or there might be a genetic factor. The result could be a child with intersex physical characteristics (between half and one percent of all births). Alternatively there might be a tendency towards homosexual response, or the brain organization might partly or wholly retain a female patterning. (There might also be similar 'tom-boy' or lesbian effects on a female foetus.) Speaking to the Council of Europe in April, 1993, L. Gooren (Professor of Transsexuality at the University of Amsterdam) noted that autopsies of transsexuals seem to show that their brain structure relates to their assigned rather than their birth sex.

This suggests that the need to crossdress is a predisposition created even before the parents are aware that a child has been conceived. Similarly, the apparently absurd claim by transsexuals that they possess a female brain trapped in a male body, or *vice versa*, may simply be true! *Psalm 51.5* says:

SURELY I WAS SINFUL AT BIRTH, SINFUL FROM THE TIME MY MOTHER  
CONCEIVED ME.

In terms of the effect of a fallen and pressured environment on the newly conceived foetus, this may be an appropriate description.

The question of cause remains unclear. Is it biologically based, as suggested by the sample of twelve crossdressers given an estrogen provocation test where seven showed a female response (compared with one of twelve men in a control sample), and by the theories of prenatal hormone influence? Or is it largely social? Some crossdressers also claim that they are merely involved in personal expression. Like Cavaliers or eighteenth century gentry they claim to be experimenting with color, texture and design without any reflection upon their manhood. Many crossdressers have concluded that there is no answer, and just concentrate on being at peace within themselves. As such, they may find the name 'transvestite' too clinical, preferring *crossdresser*, *TV* or *trannie*.

## **TRANSSEXUALS**

Transsexuals face far greater difficulties than crossdressers, but with the possibility of a partial medical resolution of their situation, in a way that is not possible with the problem of social acceptance which faces the crossdresser.

There are far fewer transsexuals than crossdressers – perhaps only 1%. They are sufficiently unhappy about their sex to seek medical help for their *Gender Dysphoria*. (Dysphoria is the opposite of euphoria.) Many of these will eventually move over into living as the opposite sex. Some will go no further; these are sometimes called ‘transgenderists’. Others, still in their thousands, will seek surgery to bring their physical appearance into line with their own perception of themselves. (Such surgery first occurred in 1930, when Danish artist Einer Wegener became Lily Elbe.)

At present there are estimated in the U.S., Canada and England, to be around three male-to-female transsexuals for every female-to-male one. This ratio has been changing over recent years as more female-to-male transsexuals come forward proportionally. In some countries, there are actually more female-to-male transsexuals, and in all countries the overall number being identified as transsexual is growing. All profess a conviction that from earliest years they have been aware of being different and knew themselves to be living a mistake. Some show hatred for their sexual organs.

It is a difficult fact, however, that although some appear naturally to fit into the desired gender, the conviction doesn’t necessarily go along with an appropriate body shape. A very tall, or heavy-built male who believes himself to be a woman cannot avoid great hurt. On the other hand the female-to-male transsexual may not face this problem. Hormone therapy will produce facial hair, and deepen the voice. The surgical process is however much more serious, and involves a double mastectomy and a hysterectomy, often followed by a series of operations to produce the appearance of male organs.

In the current state of the art the sexual element of the change is lacking. There is no mechanism for arousal, and so this will be a conditioned carryover from before surgery, and from lesser erogenous zones. ‘Sex-change’ is thus a misleading term. For many transsexuals, ‘gender reassignment surgery’ leaves a sex life that is no more than a memory. There is also no chance of either fathering or carrying a child. (The risk to the child is unlikely to make this an ethical option in the foreseeable future, even if the techniques became available.)

Thus all that is really happening is that outward appearances are brought more into line with the inner perception of the transsexuals, resulting in greater peace of mind. (There may be some direct effect from the hormone treatment: female hormones are given to sex offenders to reduce sex-drives and aggression, and so may have a tranquillizing effect on the male-to-female transsexual as well). And for the most part, this limited adjustment can only take place after a long and difficult process based on laid down medical guidelines. These are usually those produced by the *Harry Benjamin Gender Dysphoria Association* in the United States in 1979 and updated regularly.

There are, as always, some who will use money to shorten or avoid the procedures laid down for their safety, but this is fortunately rare. Such people are likely to experience major problems. Apart from those, transsexuals must satisfy two specialists that they are genuinely convinced that they are the opposite sex to the physical evidence. They must also demonstrate that they are stable enough to make the social transition, and must start to live in the opposite gender role before any substantial treatment is given. In particular they must support themselves in that role for a period which often runs into years before they can be scheduled for surgery. This is known as the 'real life test'. Since many operations are carried out privately, costing thousands of dollars, it can take this long period to raise the necessary money. And once they have made the change, they find that society refuses in a number of ways to recognize their new status, and thus denies them employment protection, the right to privacy from an inquisitive and sometimes salacious press, or the right to legal marriage.

### **COMPLICATIONS!**

There are a number of complications to be addressed when dealing with transsexuals. One that I have met several times is that someone can define themselves as a transsexual without consulting a doctor. Some crossdressers feel that they are more tolerated by the public at large if they make this claim. They may also feel that transsexuals can express themselves more openly and receive help with their physical appearance. Thus what is seen as vital to survival by the transsexual is seen as a matter of higher position in the social pecking order by the crossdresser. So a 'transsexual' may not be transsexual, but rather a crossdresser seeking social acceptance. (The opposite may also hold true. Most transsexuals believe that their condition is parallel but different to transvestism. Some as a result look down on 'fetishists'.)

Another difficulty is that there appears to be two distinct classes of trans-

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sexuals as far as the medical layman like me is concerned. There are those who from the earliest years have failed to construct a gender identity in line with their birth sex, and who have some of the appearance of the opposite sex. But there are many more who after apparently coping successfully with their given role in life suddenly seem to face a crisis in personal identity in their thirties, forties or even sixties, by which time they may have a wife and family. Some may have been crossdressers, but others just seem to develop without prior warning.

A third area of concern is that there is now so much more information available than in the past. We all have a tendency to rewrite our own personal history to make it fit our own conception of our self, and for someone with gender identity problems, to read one of the written accounts by a transsexual of their own feelings and life history (perhaps already adjusted by the author to give it a consistency that was not present in the raw experience), can influence both the way sufferers see themselves, and also what they may seek to do about their situation.

**CHILDREN**

As far as I know, there is insufficient evidence to decide whether gender identity conflict is more likely to occur where there are others in the family with such problems. I have met one twin who said that his brother also had gender difficulties, and there were three generations of crossdressers in the same family. There is more evidence in medical reports that the occasional attempts to feminize children meet with little success. 4% of a survey of 504 crossdressers in the United States some years ago reported family influence, usually a mother or aunt dressing them up, as being significant in their becoming crossdressers (a low figure when this was an approved medical explanation). On the other hand there is good evidence that this kind of attempt can be fiercely resisted by the child and have no later effect.

Many children experiment with 'dressing-up' or show behavior that could be considered outside the bounds of what is normal. For the most part this does not seem to lead to similar behavior as an adult. The child is simply exploring his or her world and its values. Indeed, there is evidence in the accounts of both crossdressers and transsexuals that they knew themselves to be different at an early age, and took care to hide both their feelings and behavior.

## 2. THINKING IT THROUGH

### BIBLICAL REFERENCES

**A** WOMAN MUST NOT WEAR MEN'S CLOTHING, NOR A MAN WEAR WOMEN'S CLOTHING, FOR THE LORD YOUR GOD DETESTS ANYONE WHO DOES THIS. *Deuteronomy 22.5*

On the face of it this is a clear condemnation of transvestism, but one that falls more heavily on women, especially since men are the secondary group in the verse, and because many women in our society could be said to cross-dress, while fewer men do.

There is no direct context, and the verse stands alone in addressing this subject. So as I see it, either it is aimed at women who wished to infiltrate the assembly of Israel, or like so much of the Law of Moses, it condemns an aspect of Canaanite fertility worship.

The first possibility would bring it into line with other calls for ritual purity, such as the exclusion of the castrated man. (See *Deuteronomy 23.1*.) This raises the question of the relevance of the Old Testament view that saw the man's seed as the sole determinant of life and its resulting effect on the place of those without this potential, as a ceremonial requirement, we would in any case link to the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law through the death of Christ. (There are some 15 references to God detesting things in the book of *Deuteronomy*. These indicate that the gold and silver of idols was to be burned, children were not to be burned, or other gods worshiped. Sacrificing flawed animals was detestable, as was not wiping out the native Canaanites, using money earned from prostitution, remarrying a wife after her second marriage, or using false weights.)

From parallels with such practices in Greece and Egypt there might well have been cross-dressing involved in Canaanite worship. This long remained a problem. (See for example *1 Kings 14.23-24*. Were male shrine-prostitutes cross-dressed?) The *Tyndale Commentary* on the *Deuteronomy* verse notes that Lucian of Samosata and Eusebius wrote of masquerade in the worship of Astarte.

In our society this verse perhaps points to the principle that sexual differences in society are important and must not be undermined. But, as with the prohibition on mixing wool and flax in *verse 11* of this chapter and the in-

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junction to make tassels for our cloaks in *verse 12*, it is also possible to argue that any context is so remote as to give this verse no direct force for today. The Kingdom of God cannot finally be a matter of what we wear (after *Matthew 6.28*).

*Deuteronomy 23.1*: NO ONE WHO HAS BEEN EMASCULATED BY CRUSHING OR CUTTING MAY ENTER THE ASSEMBLY OF THE LORD.

This verse appears to have been superceded by *Acts 8* (see below). Such a person might anyway be promised a blessing by God (*Isaiah 56.4-5*). Indeed the few references in the Old Testament to eunuchs, (and by extension transsexuals?) are surprisingly positive. Some just show that such people were part of the Royal Household: *2 Kings 20.18, Jeremiah 29.2; 34.19;41.16*; and possibly *52.25*. But it is ‘two or three eunuchs’ who throw down Jezebel at Jehu’s command (*2 Kings 9.32*). In *Jeremiah 38.7* it is Ebed-Melech, a foreigner and eunuch who successfully intercedes and rescues Jeremiah. *Daniel 1* shows another foreign eunuch allowing Daniel and his companions to remain ritually clean in the pagan Babylonian environment.

*Matthew 19.12*: “FOR SOME ARE EUNUCHS BECAUSE THEY WERE BORN THAT WAY; OTHERS WERE MADE THAT WAY BY MEN; AND OTHERS HAVE RENOUNCED MARRIAGE (MADE THEMSELVES EUNUCHS) BECAUSE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. THE ONE WHO CAN ACCEPT THIS SHOULD ACCEPT IT”.

This arises from a query by the Pharisees. Jesus upholds permanent marriage, quoting *Genesis 2.24* (with the sole exception of unfaithfulness). The Pharisees then raise the place of divorce in the Law of Moses, and Jesus replies that it is a provision to cope with human weakness. This passage thus prefigures all the arguments in the church as to whether divorce is permissible. In what seems a modern reaction, the disciples then say that if the relationship is to be permanent then it is better not to marry! The passage quoted above then follows. Jesus repudiates the view of the disciples: marriage is good, but there are groups that cannot marry: for physical reasons, by imposition, or to serve God’s purposes better. It may be that transsexuals are such a group. However, if marriage is good in this way, to break it up for transsexual reasons would seem to be against this teaching of Jesus.

*Acts 8.26-39*: This is the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip. Philip has been involved in the first Christian breakthrough outside the Jewish nation into Samaria. From this success he is called away to meet this lone individual, who is both a eunuch, and already a worshiper of

God. He is encountered as he studies the scriptures of his day. Philip instructs him and accepts him for baptism. This action shows that it is certainly possible to both God and the early church to have sexual organs removed, yet still be a Christian believer.

There is one more passage that seems important to mention.

*Genesis 1.27:* SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED HIM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM.

Thus both male and female are good, because God chose to create in this way. Equally both male and female are the image of God, either individually or in combination sharing the mark of the creator: both are needed. As I see it this verse casts no light on any form in intersex state: chromosomal or psychological. I see such a state as a result of the breakdown of harmony in creation, associated with the doctrine of the fall.

### ***OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:***

#### ***REALITY AND FANTASY***

God is the ultimate reality whose direct action sustains the universe. Because He is still at work we too have a responsibility to seek out His works and understand them. We are after all to 'LOVE GOD...WITH ALL OUR MINDS' (*Matthew 22.37*). This suggests to me that we must listen carefully to the claims of crossdressers and transsexuals and weigh such evidence as is available.

But we must also recognize that much of our world is based on masquerade and unreality. We present an image to the world, identify with characters from fiction—whether book, soap opera or film, and pretend to be what we are not. Transvestism is a more extreme, rather than a unique fantasy. And while pretense can be dangerous, our imagination is a great gift by which we can enter the feelings and condition of others, something Jesus used extensively in His parables.

For the transsexual the question of reality is vital. To bring the body into line with the transsexual's perception requires drastic surgery and continuing action to change the hormonal balance of the body. What level of need can be taken as justifying such action? We accept in our society that plastic surgery can bring health benefits by improving self image. Are we mitigat-

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ing an intolerable inner disharmony, or is this a drastic mutilation of a God-given temple for the Holy Spirit?

### ***SIN AND SELFISHNESS***

The preoccupation with self is at the heart of our problems. We are self-centered, rather than God- and other-centered. In one sense this is inevitable. We commence our lives dependent totally on the goodwill of others, and our development requires that we find ourselves as individuals. But we willfully fail to make the effort to come to terms with others and God. The crossdresser can be very selfish. He concentrates on creating a picture of himself with which he feels at ease, and in doing so he is often totally insensitive to the needs of those around him. At times he will neglect his responsibilities while on other occasions he may perform well in his masculine role.

The transsexual is also preoccupied with self. The conflicts within may leave no energy or will to relate properly to others. The hurt experienced in trying to convince others of the need for help may also lead to anger and abrasiveness.

There is a degree of personal responsibility involved in all our actions. No one, including the transgendered, is uninvolved in the causes of their own distress. Unresolved inner turmoil can affect behavior and the way life is viewed. Personal behavior can also be an important factor in how others react to our difficulties. The crossdresser is more likely to cross-dress when under pressure. A guilty conscience over crossdressing may override other, more direct wrongs done to others, at the same time as it increases the pressure to dress itself. Resolving wrongs done may itself reduce the compulsiveness of the behavior.

### ***WHOLENESS***

If the human is meant to be a unity of spirit, soul and body, then anything that moves the person towards such a unity ought to be desirable. This will include medical and psychological support, as well as prayer, counseling and friendship. It may also lead to socially unacceptable conclusions: 'dressing' must be less harmful than the drug or alcohol dependency which may replace it, for example.

We talk of mankind being made in the image of God. It seems to me that one of the central aspects of this image is that we accept responsibility for our actions. If this is so, we must help those who have gender identity prob-

lems to take control of their own lives. This also means that aspects of society that hinder this must be addressed. Much of the problem facing those with gender difficulty is that society treats them as less than human. The church has a role in challenging that attitude.

### **GENDER**

Gender can be simply defined as masculine or feminine behavior. As such it varies between cultures in a way that sex does not. In our society some crossdressers point with bitterness to women's magazines which portray 'mannish' fashions, and tell their readers to 'raid their partner's wardrobes'. For a woman to cross-dress is fashion, for a man it is perversion!

Most women who cross-dress are not pursuing masculinity. Yet there might be some cross-gender aspects. Opportunities for at least some women have improved significantly in recent years. They can work in industry, management, the armed forces, or even be clergy, if they are prepared to pay the price. Because this wide range of lifestyle is available, some women have adopted 'masculine' ways in expressing this freedom.

I also see a pressure to exclude men from the caring side of life. In a significant number of homes there is either a single mother, or no permanent male presence. A minority seek same-sex couples, or no direct involvement by the man in the procreation of children. Men are portrayed (often justly) as violent and promiscuous. Efforts to counter this – the 'New Man' or 'wimp' – retain negative feelings not associated with 'tom-boy'. And yet many men are caring, and not at home with the 'macho' image of films and the like.

This situation is a far cry from the Biblical view of man and woman that sees them as complementary. So is the crossdresser, who periodically crosses the gender divide, and the transsexual who identifies with the opposite gender role, part of a breakdown in our social order, or merely a reminder of the variety that has always existed among men and women? In his booklet *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage*, also published by Grove Press, Professor O'Donovan argues that we should not think of gender as a spectrum. Given that this is a central aspect of his booklet it seems redundant to rehash his arguments. I see his 'bi-morphic' model as in line with *Genesis 1.27*. In my view, evidence over the decade since his booklet was published has strengthened the case that there are people who are psychologically intersex, as well as those with an in-between physiology. (This position was also advanced at the *Council of Europe Colloquy on Transsexualism, Medicine, and Law* in April 1993.)

### ***RECOGNITION***

At various points in the history of the churches they have faced up to the needs of particular groups. Many famous Christians of the last century in particular are associated with the recognition of outcast groups – women, orphans, prisoners, etc. – and with social justice. In our age, and on particular issues, the transgendered are an outcast group. The question of marriage is addressed in the Grove booklet already mentioned, except that recent Australasian case law, and legislation in some E.C. countries already implies that foreign transsexuals will soon have rights in this country denied to British nationals. But beyond this, why should someone be denied employment protection, and be vulnerable to press exploitation because of a medical condition? Or why should anyone be liable to arrest due to a third party's misconceptions?

### ***A SENSE OF PROPORTION***

Without minimizing the seriousness of the issues involved, I think it is necessary to keep a sense of proportion. Transvestism is as mundane as putting on clothes. It is not usually a question of physical abuse or violence or rape. Questions about the use of time or money are just as appropriate to some hobbies: golf, perhaps, or playing a musical instrument. It does not involve the physical and mental deterioration which accompanies drug or alcohol dependency, perhaps the opposite.

The potential for real hurt to others must be greater with the transsexual, since there is a permanent change envisaged. As I see it, though, the hurt from suicides in the days before the possibility of change existed was even greater. Such suicides still happen.

### 3. PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

#### THE PASTORAL APPROACH

Many crossdressers and transsexuals seem genuinely gentle, at least in their desired role. They tend to feel that society's reaction is the problem, rather than their behavior. So they are unlikely to come for help to a Christian about something they would class as a personal need, albeit a compulsive one. And perhaps they are right!

Some years ago Mgr. Adrian Dwyer wrote concerning transvestism, or 'femmegersonation' (FP), for an American book:

"It seems to me that some men actually do practice FP without serious moral danger to themselves or anyone else. These people do not have a moral problem, since there is nothing intrinsically evil in adopting one manner of dress in preference to another. The fact that a man may assume the dress and general appearance of a woman is not in itself and by itself a seriously immoral act." (*Femmegersonation and the Church* included in Virginia Prince, *The Crossdresser and his Wife* (1967, 6<sup>th</sup> edition 1990)).

He then goes on to outline areas in which there might be moral problems, in relation to children, wives, finance and deception.

However, if we are approached for help we will still need to decide whether the person coming for help needs personal repentance, or support in coping with a hostile society. In practice we may well conclude that both factors apply. But the bottom line is this: either we try to help this person for whom Christ died, or else we 'pass by on the other side'.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES

##### 1. *First Aid*

All of us need to feel loved and accepted for ourselves. Each person is infinitely valuable, because God exchanged His life for theirs on the Cross. The person who comes to us needs to know we care, since the only way they are likely to see Christ is in us. This acceptance is especially vital to the person who has gender difficulties. The repeated efforts to 'give up' or cope with his behavior, the hurt inflicted on those he cares for most, or the secrecy eating away at relationships, may leave him consumed by guilt feelings.

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So the crossdresser or transsexual needs to be treated as a human being. This is the sort of help that many of the groups around the country provide. Ostensibly it may just be a safe environment in which to dress up. But a (genuine) woman who has many years of helping experience pointed out to me that what she was doing allowed the crossdresser to accept himself, because she and others would accept him regardless of appearance. If God looks on the heart, and not on the outward appearance, as Scripture claims, then the least we can do is to talk to these people. If we can't manage this, then we may need to think hard about our own compassion or sexuality. Once a problem has been brought into the open without the aura of fear, there is some chance of putting it into perspective. In many accounts I have read, crossdressers have found the compulsion to 'dress' has lessened when acknowledged to others and openly discussed.

### *2. Community*

Mankind is not a naturally solitary species. We seek out company, and prolonged deprivation may produce adverse effects on behavior. This is an important consideration for those who feel cut off from normality. The outcast, whether due to gender problems, or for some other reason, needs the company of others with whom they can develop honest and open relationships. This is one function of the specialist groups. But there is also a need for the person with gender problems to be exposed to other concerns, in the company of those with their own problems, challenges and successes. The church should be an ideal community for people to find release and inner peace. Although there are groups which do meet in church halls and the like, I find it sad that for the most part transgender groups have had to turn to gay venues to find meeting places and a degree of common humanity.

### *3. Challenge*

For some, first aid may be all they can or will accept. But for the Christian this cannot be enough. The object of the Christian life is to help people become more whole, and more holy. The behavior of the crossdresser is flawed: at times he will be all man, at others he needs to portray a feminine image. So what degree of wholeness are we seeking to encourage? Some years ago Margaret Duggan wrote in *Church Times* that it was the combination of masculine toughness and feminine sensitivity which produces interesting personalities in both men and women. Such a combination of characteristics has a divine precedent. Jesus was a man with all the tender feminine attributes of sympathy, gentleness and compassion. So equally divided does His personality seem between the masculine and the feminine that it suggests that it is somewhere near the middle of the gender spectrum that true wholeness lies. On that basis it seems to me that what we are looking for is personal integration. Many 'feminine' qualities are fully appropriate for a

man. The aim is to make them effective without the need for a dressed up 'stage' upon which to present them.

#### *4. Compromise*

If wholeness is our objective, then I believe that we have to start with the possible. We all have to accept limits on our behavior. This applies to those with gender identity difficulty as well. Unless living full-time in their desired gender role, they will already be using a measure of control over their behavior, whether from fear of discovery, or by agreement. It seems worthwhile trying to reinforce this approach. The crossdresser and his wife can agree on times and places to dress, memberships in groups, subscriptions to magazines, etc. A helpful step for some crossdressers might be to encourage them to dress fully on the agreed occasions, and not at all outside such times. Wearing female lingerie beneath male outer clothes is a mix of fantasy and reality, and faces any wife with a continuous need to adjust. I feel that the active decision this step requires may also help the crossdresser to take responsibility for himself. As I see it, compromise with the transsexual or transgenderist is not possible in this way. What may be possible is to encourage them to accept parts of the old life: positive skills, pleasures and experiences. We want them to become people, not a stereotype woman to replace a stereotype man.

#### *5. Development*

If crossdressing is a genuine love of the feminine, then I think that we need to challenge this femininity by exposing it to the real thing! Wives of crossdressers can be deeply hurt by a portrayal that consists of looking into the mirror, or spending hours pampering themselves. It is an insulting idea of how most women spend their time.

Many crossdressers have made such an effort to conceal their feelings that these can only come out when they are 'dressed'. Thus many will only help around the home at such times. They should be encouraged to broaden the gentler aspects of their life. Why can't a man help with cleaning, or cooking? Wholeness is worthwhile in itself, but it may help some crossdressers with their compulsion as well. A crossdresser speaking on television in September 1992 indicated that he rarely dressed now except to appear on such discussions to publicize the condition. He was now more secure in his masculine role.

As a general principle the crossdresser needs to be encouraged to be useful. Rather than to sit around 'all dressed up with nowhere to go', his feelings should be turned towards loving care for others, particularly his wife and family. Mirror gazing must surely become boring?

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### *6. Healing and Forgiveness*

A person who opens their life to Christ can expect to be changed by the touch of the living God. Every area of a Christian's life should be open to God. Problems can be and are resolved. It may be, however, that gender identity problems are more akin to say, left-handedness. We would be right to pray for forgiveness for the hurt caused to the person who is different, and to those touched by his life for the selfishness that is so often part of the condition to be overcome. But would we be right to pray for a 'cure'?

I think that this is an area where a lot of listening and a lot of praying is likely to be necessary before we can even begin to think of ministry. Being friend enough to give time and attention is the best help we can offer, provided we are equally open to the wisdom of the Spirit. Because if we are trusted as a friend, our efforts and mistakes will be seen in a better light, and we will dispel hurt rather than increase it. The deeper the problem, the more will the attitude of prayer be needed, and the more definite the confirmation needed before any form of 'deliverance' is attempted. Here we may be concerned with a level of personality that precedes birth. It is hard to imagine a level deeper than that! I would want the support of someone more experienced in this area before I would risk such a prayer as opposed to a prayer for the right use of any potential for gentleness and creativity. (I have met crossdressers who sought 'deliverance' and who have been hurt and hardened by rejection when the 'cure' failed.)

The transsexual is facing anguish and difficulties already so great that the potential for disaster is enormous. Someone could easily be pushed over the edge, especially at particular times of crisis.

### *7. A Reminder*

In this life we do not have final answers. Our love, our faith, our transformation is incomplete. Whatever level of wholeness or healing we can release into our own life, or that of others, is partial, and will be swallowed up in the glory to come. We may have to work for the least harmful compromise in a nasty situation, or be left dismayed at the decisions made by the one we have sought to help, but we should not lose heart. *2 Chronicles 30.18-23* reminds us that God blessed those who had responded to Hezekiah's call to worship, even though they had not got all the details right. We need to take care that we do not add more burdens to those already carrying a heavy load of pain, even if we are prepared to help carry those burdens. Equally we need to remember that God can and does work for good in situations where we see no result.

## 4. PRACTICAL POINTS

### A. CROSSDRESSERS

I have met three groups of crossdressers seeking help. The first wanted to understand their behavior better, but were afraid to see a doctor, or other professional, in case a record was kept. Others were looking for help after being discovered. My first contact was of this kind, where the crossdresser was trying to save his marriage. A third group have been active churchgoers, or perhaps ‘Godfearers’, who were afraid they might be offending God.

### TELLING OTHERS

A common query is whether others, especially the partner, should be told. Often the motive will be selfish – to gain greater freedom to ‘dress’, to spread the burden of guilt and fear, or to obtain permission, possibly from the helper as well. (Domination, which is often a theme in fiction and on telephone ‘sex’ lines may be a way to pass the responsibility to someone else.) On the other hand we long to be open with those we love and this may also be a reason for disclosure.

There are risks in telling. If the wife cannot accept his behavior divorce is likely. Most wives tolerate the situation, leaving the crossdresser not much better off, and the wife burdened as well. There is also a real chance that the marriage will benefit over time: he may be able to put more into his marriage, and may be more relaxed in himself (and thus easier to live with).

The longer the marriage has continued, the more the hurt that may result when the secret is revealed. I do know of one person who simply hadn’t identified with the caricatures in the press and was able to make a successful disclosure when he did find out that he wasn’t unique, but in general the delay represents a lack of trust that must be corrosive.

A prospective wife has the right to be told. Unfortunately the crossdresser will think that marriage will cure him (and the compulsion may well have disappeared in the first joy of a relationship), and she is unlikely to realize how significant the confession is, even if it is made!

Thus any advice will need to be cautious, any disclosure gentle. A possible method would be by letter, setting out his feelings for his wife, his needs and fears, and perhaps why he thinks he has this compulsion. It must be understood that disclosure is the start of a process, not its end.

### **VENTURING OUT**

A full crossdresser is likely to want to go out in public. If so, he is best directed to a group. To meet others can give him perspective, and there may be wives who can help his wife, as well as impart some sense to him. In any event he must be told that to go out locally risks his family's reputation, and that to venture out at night is as dangerous as for a woman, and may attract police attention.

An alternative might be the postal correspondence system of *Tri-Ess* in the United States or the *Beaumont Society* in England, where there are officers throughout the country, and where only interviewed and 'sponsored' members can write back, giving a measure of security. I know of similar systems operated for those with transsexual feelings. In addition there is the Internet where Christian on-line discussion groups such as *T-G CHRISTIANS* and *EMERGENCE* have substantial presence.

### **PARENTS AND FAMILIES**

I have met several wives who thoroughly enjoy and support their husband's crossdressing. However if he is selfish and unwilling to compromise, any relationship will soon deteriorate. To discover that a spouse is a crossdresser will usually be a shock, and raises many questions: Is he gay? Will he want a sex change? What of the danger of exposure? It may also bring relief that it is nothing worse! But it still produces an unpredictable situation in which basic 'ground rules' must be reexamined and actions will be searched for hidden motives. His appearance may also be a problem: is this how he views her and other women? She may not find the portrayal attractive. She may also feel that her own femininity is deficient.

If the hurdle of acceptance is passed, the crossdresser will usually start to overdo things. The wife will need support as she attempts to negotiate acceptable compromises. The husband must make an effort! Then the marriage can be strengthened. Some wives speak of gaining a new best friend. Others feel as if they are being forced to share their home with another woman.

The dangers of sharing with children are very great. They may talk about it, and bring down ridicule on their own heads, or find it adds to the normal questions concerning their own sexuality in puberty. It certainly requires both partners to be in agreement.

With parents the response may well be guilt: that in some way it is their

fault. Having grown up in an era when less was known about such things they may well be negative about it. But love can still outweigh fear.

### ***B. TRANSSEXUALS***

It seems to me that transsexuals who come for help face three main problem areas. First they may need support in thinking through their true gender identity. There is an immense difference between deciding that you cannot function well as a man, and being able to live successfully as a woman.

If they are referred to a clinic, there will be medical and perhaps peer support from others, as well as numerous organized support groups. But at many points there will be a need for personal support or challenge: as new patterns of life and work or redundancy are faced, as financial problems arise at the changeover, as hormones produce discomfort and emotional outbursts, and as surgery is awaited. The six to eight weeks before surgery can be very hard. Besides anxiety about major surgery, and the decision itself, the withdrawal of hormones to reduce the risk of blood clots may result in anguish over side effects such as hair regrowth and shrinkage of the breasts.

Not least, however, will be the need for support afterwards. A bridge has been crossed and there is no return. Others may think that the problems are over. But that is rarely the case: many years of anxiety don't just vanish without trace. Even if there are no problems with the new lifestyle, the post-operative transsexual will still have to live a life without the years of automatic training that we take for granted. She (he) will face far more moments of stress than others of her (his) age. There may be notoriety or fear of it. The new life raises many moral and practical issues.

It also needs to be remembered that for every transsexual who follows the surgical or transgenderist route and gains a measure of serenity, there will be several who cannot meet the criteria. This group is of particular concern, since, in effect, they are trapped in limbo. And particularly where they have rushed through surgery, there are a few who have discovered that they have made an irreversible mistake. A caring commitment here is likely to be long lasting.

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### ***THE PARTNERS OF TRANSSEXUALS***

I do not see how anyone not in that position can understand the pain of someone married to a transsexual. Once treatment is started it seems to me that the situation is like a bereavement. Perhaps the relationship survives in a different form, but the need for help is long term. I wish I knew of a support group for such people. Sadly, I do not.

### ***C. CHRISTIANS WHO ARE TRANSGENDERED***

Many who come to a living faith in Christ do so not as a child, but as an adolescent or adult. Under those circumstances it is likely that any crossdresser pattern will already be established. In the first flush of joy or peace the problem may go away, but it will very likely recur. This will cause great guilt. If the Christian also marries then this guilt will be increased: Christians just don't do such things!

A common feature of most of the Christians who have talked to me is a feeling of letting their side down: no one else in the fellowship they attend is as bad a sinner as they. Yet they often seem more open and caring out of their own sense of weakness.

On the other hand most transsexuals already believe that there is a physiological basis to their problem, and so the question of guilt may take second place to questions of how to act for the best. As a generalization, their faith is a support, not a problem.

### ***CROSSDRESSER AND TRANSSEXUAL MINISTERS***

Newspapers occasionally run stories about ministers who are crossdressers or transsexual. I have met over 40 between 1993 and 2000, and know of a number of others. If fairly casual research can turn up this number there are likely to be many more. (I understand that a transgender group solely for clergy exists in the United States.)

The church press have reported surveys of male ordinands and clergy that show them to have 'feminine' caring qualities. This is desirable in someone who is there to nurture and encourage the life of a local congregation. Some such however will have gender problems, just as others have better known differences in sexual orientation. From my encounters, it seems to me, that such ministers may sublimate much of their gender problem into loving service.

As with the recommendations of the Church of England Bishops, in respect to homosexual clergy in *Issues in Human Sexuality*, I see no virtue, and nothing to be gained, in searching out such people. If their behavior does create pastoral difficulties then that is a different matter. There is a recent play called *Body and Soul*. The plot revolves around the problems facing a Bishop when an old and capable friend returns to his parish from a sabbatical in which he has undergone gender reassignment as a woman. There are situations where this has already occurred; Julie and I know several.

### **CHURCH ATTENDANCE**

Some crossdressers attend church services while ‘dressed’. If they are not identified then there is no practical problem. Similarly I met a post-operative transsexual at the Manchester Conference who attends a church near mine, where her background is not known.

Where this is not the case there is a problem. To gain a reputation of receiving ‘odd’ worshippers may drive away those with children, or who are afraid. Yet we are not there to reject people. Wisdom might find a compromise – the crossdresser could perhaps attend services as a male, and some kind of service at home could be offered. This kind of dilemma will take some working out. The minister may feel he or she is condoning a masquerade, while the crossdresser may feel that his feminine persona is the more real part of him. There may not be an acceptable solution, but I feel there is an obligation at least to talk the matter through.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

In this article, I have tried to outline the world of the person who faces gender identity conflict as I have seen it over the past few years. I have also tried to offer suggestions to help those who want it. My hope is that by shedding light, healing and progress will be easier.

I see two dangerous responses to those with gender problems. One that I have discussed already is a ‘deliverance’ approach. Much of what I have read assumes a psychological cause, and gives the impression that problems of gender identity can be easily resolved. I believe that neither assumption is necessarily correct. My experience suggests that the transgendered vary immensely, and any standard approach is likely to be wrong.

The other is an uncritical acceptance of all that these groups say of themselves. Even if a transsexual woman does have a feminine mind, what of the effects of

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working for years in a perhaps very masculine and aggressive job? The situation of transsexuals in particular is so complex that to accept their own self-assessment can be as disastrous as with any other person coming for help.

Some crossdressers claim that they can offer both masculine and feminine insights from within themselves. Again I believe that this needs to be proved.

A realistic approach must continue to pose many questions. But those questions must also be directed back at us. Do we represent Christian values to those who are different, or do we merely seek their conformity to our patterns of behavior to save ourselves embarrassment?

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Many people have provided help and support as I learned how wrong my assumptions were in this area. I owe particular thanks to Mark Rees, and to Alice Purnell and the Gender Trust for their help with transsexual matters. Ray and Christine, Martine and Cathy (of Rose's Club) and an evangelical crossdresser minister enlightened me greatly about transvestism, as did Christine-Jane who criticized the draft as well as providing the cover art.

My own Diocese of Rochester not only suggested that I write this, but also helped me to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Gender Dysphoria Conference held at Manchester University in 1992, and further conferences since. The Ethics group of Grove Books provided both support and needed criticism.

I have tried to provide a simple but accurate account of a complex subject. I am solely responsible for any mistake in this attempt, and for the conclusions offered.