

VIII
EPILOG

PAT ROBERTSON ON SRS

It seems someone wrote in asking Pat Robinson whether or not they should return to their former gender. And Pat Robinson states unequivocally that being TG and having SRS is not a sin.

Okay, we know this, but as far as I know this is the first time a major, highly visible, fundamental/evangelical/conservative/charismatic figure has stated this opinion so clearly.

Here's the quote:

Terry Meeuwssen: Well, here's the last one and this is a tough one.

Letter Writer: "I'm 40 years old and have had a sex change. I've been watching your program and was wondering if God forgave me, should I live as I am now or go back to my birth gender?"

Pat Robertson: This is a very serious question and I appreciate it. There are people who are born with various types of hormonal activity in their bodies and they feel more male than female and more female than male. I know a plastic surgeon here, in this area, who indeed does that sort of thing and uh, to accommodate what is going on in people's lives.

Terry Meeuwssen: This is a very legitimate hormonal thing happening.

Pat Robertson: Exactly. So, it is not a sin. So you don't need to feel guilty. But know also if you want to go back to where you were, uh...this man could get very graphic. His name is Dr. Charles Horton and he is one of the most distinguished plastic surgeons and he specializes in urinary type activities, genital, uh deformities and he was telling me two twins, they were two boys, and the surgeon when they were doing circumcision, um, burned off the male organ of one of these little boys so they made him into a girl. I mean the surgeons actually fixed him up so he had now, uh, (fumbling over words) so when he got to be 21 years old he was a cheerleader and all that kinda stuff and (fumbling over words) and said "I'm a boy". He started feeling these things so they were able to reverse this and Horton has techniques to restore, it's amazing, he has pioneered, it's the most incredible thing. There are many people who have been in battle who have had the genitals actually blown off and he can restore these. It's remarkable what he can do. So you say, will God forgive me. Of course He will, He does. This isn't something

Epilog

that you have sinned and if you wish to get back and you're 40 years old, it's not exactly too late. I know as I say, one man who can do a sex change reversal.

Terry Meeuwsen: God is interested in what his heart's attitude is, speaking spiritually.

Pat Robertson: God does not care what your external organs are. The question is whether you are living for God or not. Yes, He loves you. Yes, He forgives you and He understands what is going on in your body.

700 Club Broadcast
October 5, 1999

Thank you Pat Robertson and Terry Meeuwsen!

GENDER IDENTITY AND LIFE'S PILGRIMAGE

Rev. David Horton

One of the basic beliefs of economics is that wants are infinite. In other words, when we have got what we wanted we suddenly discover something else to desire. This doesn't just apply to economics, though. At the basic level we look for food, drink and shelter. It is only when those needs are met that other wants begin to surface. Companionship is a major need we all have, and so on. The need to find ourselves is more subtle and tends to come to the fore either when other needs are met, or when the existing stability is threatened. It is unlikely to be in the forefront of people's minds in Ruanda, or in the front line of combat, for example.

The means by which that need to find ourselves is met can also vary. One approach identifies three ways of doing this: by reference to others, by identifying with a cause, or by creating our own inner value system. All of us use all three, but my guess would be that those who are mainly following others, or a cause, are less likely to seek to do something about identity problems, and to push them aside instead.

My understanding is that gender identity is built up in the same way by everyone, but that in a few cases that process leads to different results. In other words, it is not that some people have a wrong gender identity, with its implication that something needs to be corrected. Rather, such people are simply a variation. That variation may be very obvious or latent, but it is not in itself wrong.

From this, it seems to me that it then becomes a question of acting for the best for those involved. If there is nothing wrong, then don't fix it! On the other hand if there are problems that can be resolved, then why not? What does seem dangerous is to assume one solution will apply to everyone. I believe in the God of the snowflake, who enjoys our individuality for itself. I also believe in a God who wants and respects our choices, despite the problems. Our society seems to want to pigeonhole people, with its progress towards a world culture. Our nature is to be ourselves, and so we seek ways to be different through our lifestyles, hobbies, and the like.

Thus I come to pilgrimage, and John Bunyan's hymn:

*"Who would true valour see, let him come hither
One here will constant be, come wind, come weather.
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim."*

I think that the idea of making a pilgrimage through life offers much to us all. Firstly, it avoids the trap of thinking that we have somehow "arrived". We are continually changing: our bodies change, we learn and experience, our understanding changes. We are not the same person as we were just a few weeks ago. No situation is so bad that it cannot change for the better. No pinnacle of achievement will allow us to avoid further change and development. Indeed particular achievements may not cause us satisfaction in the long run: beware of what you ask for – you may get it! In effect we are reminded that nothing can keep us from our journey indefinitely.

Secondly, it is a solitary action, although often carried out in the company of others. It is our choice, our responsibility. Others may guide and encourage, or be there as an opportunity for us to help. The final decision is ours. Throughout our journey of life we can learn to be individuals and not clones of some other person or persons.

Thirdly, it requires us to hold lightly to things. The pilgrim travels light, and in circumstances where the little he has can easily be lost or used for others. There is a great difference owning things and being owned by things. The same is true of our bodies and minds. We need to respect them, not indulge them!

Finally, it looks beyond itself. If nothing in life can satisfy, then we look beyond this life to God. If we lack the maturity and wisdom to act wisely, then we ask for help. If we are tempted to give up, then we can take advantage of the example of others.

Our gender identity is uniquely ours. Our journey through life is also unique. We should not therefore be afraid of being ourselves. Arguably, this is our reason for existence. In any case, we have no choice.

Pilgrimage is also the response to a fallen world. St. Paul speaks of the whole creation groaning. We face challenges to our integrity from within, and from our circumstances: the world, the flesh and the devil. The world used by

By the Grace of God

Jesus for repentance is *metanoia* and it implies we are moving. In fact, that we are on the wrong road and choose to return to the fork where we went wrong and head off in the right direction. Similarly, in the Bible, salvation can be in one of three ways: we have made the change, we are making the change, and one day the change will be complete. Again, a process is implied.

Yet we cannot return to our beginnings. In gender terms there is evidence that that would not be far enough back anyway.

“ARE WE TO RETURN TO THE WOMB AND BE BORN A SECOND TIME?”

asked Nicodemus of Jesus. No – what Jesus required was that we move in the right direction in our life: towards openness and love to ourselves, others, and God. He also promised help to those who wanted it, by God’s own activity in our lives through the Comforter, the Advocate, the one like Jesus. A comforter is the one who strengthens; an advocate speaks on behalf of his client.

Is gender an area of our pilgrimage that has special problems? It seems unlikely that God regards it as so special. Paradoxically, the Bible (and most other faiths) concentrates on the small things, as the best indication and builder of character. On the other hand, the sheer cultural pressure of being different makes it difficult to come to terms with a variant gender identity, just as similar pressures exist for the very intelligent, or the blind, or any group that stands out. Those who take their cue from others, or who follow a narrow or selfish view of life, may make life difficult out of fear.

In essence, pilgrimage is a narrow way. As such many may not find the courage to embrace it. But if it is a narrow and uphill way, it is nonetheless a way that leads to a high and open view of life. At least that is what I have found from those I know who follow such a path the most firmly.

DISCUSSION

Several of those attending this seminar obviously started feeling under pressure. The first few minutes of the time available was thus spent remembering the personal significance and importance of each person present. We are people, not clients, or labels, or numbers. I then introduced the concept of pilgrimage as a useful way of looking at our lives. A handout was available and used in summary.

When the seminar was opened a number of people shared both where they felt they had reached on their journey, and importantly, how their view had changed as they had moved along the years. One made the point about the

Epilog

spiritual help she had felt along the way, not in a formal or Christian sense. Many agreed with her that the path they were treading would be very hard without the ability to reach beyond for help.

We then had a period of silence for personal reflection. This was ended by the reading of the first verse of John Bunyan's hymn.

It is an unique discipline to bring people into inner calm. I am enormously grateful to all who helped end the session in such a way that many of those present left feeling refreshed, encouraged, and valued. The atmosphere of peace and harmony was very valuable.

David Horton
The Christian Love Letter, 2000

This was the report of a seminar taken by David at the 3rd International Gender Dysphoria Conference held at Manchester University in September, 1994.