



TRANSFORMATIVE CREATURES: THEOLOGY, GENDER DIVERSITY AND HUMAN IDENTITY

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Introduction

- Christians can be understood as curators and shapers, not just receivers, of our own lives and traditions.
- Christian constructive theology must take into account multiplicities of human embodied experience.
- Gender must be figured according to a proleptic and provisional way, as something that we receive but also shape and hone.

Christianity and Transformation

- **John Chrysostom:** being formed into the likeness of Christ
- **Paul of Tarsus:** wrestling with grace, agency, and changing identity
- **Athanasius, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa:** appeals to theosis and deification
- **Schleiermacher:** transformation toward virtue, via self-recognition
- Yet sex has often seemed less negotiable

Christianity and Transformation

- “My gender identity is woven through my sense of calling. Transformation, change and new life are at the heart of the Gospel and are all facts of life for trans people ... I am called because of, not despite, my transness.” (Clare-Young 2019: 78)



Christianity and Transformation

- **Mathias Wirth:** gender transition and conversion
 - *simultaneously public and private;*
 - *acknowledge endings as well as beginnings;*
 - *involve agential volition as well as more passive acceptance of an external power;*
 - *appeal to a new identity in its fullness and yet recognize that it must also be grown into*
 - *frequently involve changes to the body*



Universität Bern

Christianity and Transformation

- **Regina Ammicht Quinn:**
Christianity must be “converted” toward faith in a God greater than human attempts to maintain order: converted, in fact, toward a grand creative disorder.



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Christianity and Transformation

- “A great idea ... is elicited and expanded by trial ... It tries, as it were, its limbs, and proves the ground under it, and feels its way. From time to time it makes essays which fail, and are in consequence abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” (Newman 1878: 40)

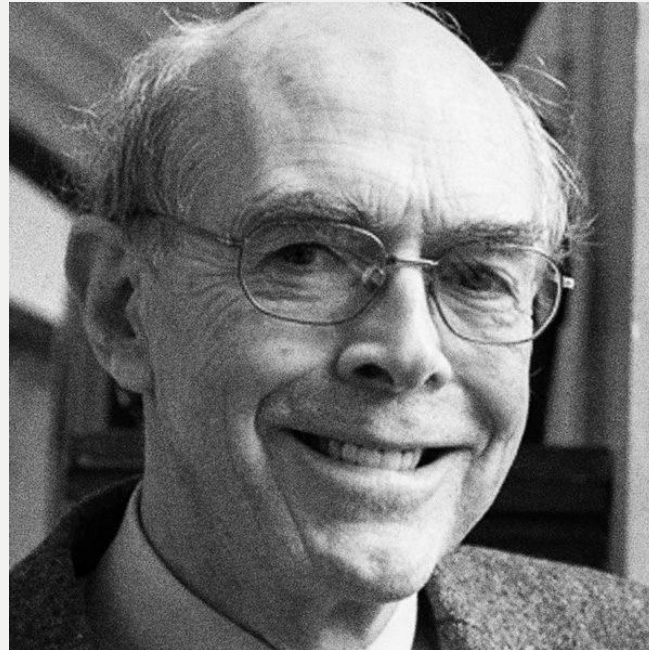
Christianity and Transformation

Mark Yarhouse



Biola University

Oliver O'Donovan



Calvin University

Andrew T. Walker



Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

Christianity and Transformation

- **St Macrina:** body and soul together constitute the self.
- Attachment to any manifestation of the body pre-resurrection is attachment to personhood under the effects of evil.



Christianity and Transformation

- “Macrina argues that our identity *is* bodily, but that the sufferings and passages of time that alter our bodies mean that we are an imperfect version of ourselves in this life. Who we will be at the resurrection will be free from the influence of evil and the ravages of impermanence. The passing of time is an effect on us, and is not essential to who we are. We are more than the sum total of what is done to us and happens to us. Importantly, this means that there is still a wholeness to us as persons even when time and the changes of this world disfigure us.” (Brown Dewhurst 2020: 452)



E. Brown Dewhurst

Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- Wide variety of explanations for the apparent connection between gender diversity and neurodiversity, e.g. that autistic people
 - *have an impaired capacity for empathy*
 - *often seek clarity and precision, so may be more invested in finding precise gender categories that do justice to their identity*
 - *have less tolerance for letting arbitrary social norms (including gender conventions) go unchallenged*
 - *may be more willing to disclose gender variance, and less reserved about seeking medical intervention for their gender diversity*

Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- Autistic individuals' "tendency to be naive, immature, and inexperienced in socializing may lead an individual, male or female, to conclude that s/he does not fit in with his/her cohort, and that s/he would better fit in with the opposite gender." (Pasterski, Gilligan and Curtis 2014: 391)



Hold Up Films, Arte
France Cinéma

Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- “Given that autism can be an objective burden to human lives, and given that there may be human-made causes for autism, which should better be avoided, nobody should *construct* autism as uniformly non-pathological, which is an act of domination itself and in danger of paternalism. On the other hand, nobody is in a position to draw a clear boundary between autism that is non-pathological and autism that is pathological. The individual must have priority.” (Evers 2017: 168)

Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- Insights from neurodiversity movement:
 - *norms of illness, pathology, functionality and health are deeply cultured and contingent*
 - *diagnosis and management can become ways of disappearing or selecting out particular pathologized differences*
 - *well-motivated attempts to “protect” people deemed vulnerable are not immune from patterns of paternalism and control*

Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- “An unusual mental condition may be experienced as a burden, a challenge to oneself and to others, but it must not be seen as defect, failure, deformity, or, in a religious perspective, as deviance from the will of the creator.” (Evers 2017: 180)



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Trans Identity and Neurodiversity

- **Melanie Yergeau:**
neuroqueerness



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Conclusions

- We are **transformative** creatures
- *Transformative* creatures
- *Transformative* creatures

Conclusions

- There is no health in us.
- In Christ, *everything* has changed – *even* that which appears to have stayed the same.
- The old has gone and the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

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