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The Doctrine of Humankind



GOD CREATED THEM, MALE AND FEMALE

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I.

Few subjects generate such dissonant cultural clashes as the relationship between biology and gender and its meaning for human identity. Following the influx of social feminism's influence in the mainstream, evangelicals of various theological convictions sought to delineate theologically their paradigm of gender differentiation and its significance, both through the written word and organizational advocacy. Propelling these efforts was an effort to apply rightly the significance of mankind being created male and female.

Two ideologies emerged. To define generally (and avoid belaboring the familiar), the belief that one's biological sex should neither predict nor limit one's relational or ecclesial roles became known as "egalitarianism," while the belief that one's biological sex indicates and prescribes one's relational or ecclesial roles became known as "complementarianism."¹ Both views claim male and female are equal; both views claim to interpret accurately the same biblical passages; and both views claim the other is, at least in part, guilty of theological error.

These themes are worthy of our ongoing consideration. Given the tectonic shifts in Western cultural values within the last several decades, we neglect them to the erosion of our public witness as well as to our own ruin. Indeed, every generation must search and apply the enduring precepts of Scripture to their transitory times. Cultural acquiescence threatens the integrity of Christian belief and practice

¹Complementarianism is the view to which I hold. See "The Danvers Statement," *The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, accessed September 1, 2020; available from <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

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in our day just as it did in the Apostle Paul's.

Within evangelicalism, the pervasive questions in these debates are two-fold: First and foundationally, how and to what extent does Genesis 1–3 inform and direct our sex-based gender identities and relational roles? For, how one interprets and applies the Creation narrative portends all subsequent biblical interpretation related to gender roles and relations. Second and consequently, in light of our created identities as male or female, how ought men and women express their respective genders socially, relationally, and ecclesiastically? For, if sexual differentiation is in fact essential to our personhood as God's image-bearers, then we must determine why and for what purpose.

However, the digital din of debate over evangelical gender roles has been nearly eclipsed by the clamor of a new rhetoric, with concepts like gender fluidity, gender nonconformity, and transgenderism rapidly transposing cultural mores. Before one can answer the question of what ministries a woman can fulfill in the church, one must now first define what a woman is. Before one can defend marriage as a covenant between male and female, one must be prepared to stipulate that maleness and femaleness are unalterably determined at birth. In short, conversations on *how* one expresses one's gender risk falling on deaf ears apart from a clear defense of *why* gender differentiation matters at all. And, in a society that increasingly accepts the idea that one's biology is irrelevant to determine one's gender, answering this *why* seems more urgent than ever.

As the chorus of advocates claiming gender is little more than a social performance continues to grow, much of complementarian discourse has defaulted to amplifying familiar refrains: delineating and debating specific roles, stipulating gender expressions, managing the *how*.² However, in view of our present moment, it is all the more urgent that we articulate the *why*. Why did God create sex differentiation? Why did he create male and female? In what follows, I propose that complementarian evangelicals must recover the relational character of mankind as male and female—a characteristic that pervades all of Scripture—and reframe their discourse to emphasize relationality prior to roles. This shift preserves both ontological equality between male and female as well as the meaning

²Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

created sex differentiation gives to manhood and womanhood. I hasten to add this assertion does not make the idea of specific gender responsibilities mutually exclusive to human relationality; it is an unfortunate and ironic reality in my own theological community that affirming the equality of women leaves one open to suspicion of closeted heterodoxy. Nonetheless, I choose to believe the best of my readers and am confident they will choose not to conclude that which I have not claimed.

Thus, we begin—as all conversations on mankind as male and female must—at the beginning.

II.

Scripture's first chapters describe humanity in relational terms.³ In Genesis 1:26–28, the affiliation between male and female is one of essential equality and distinct personhood in their relationship to God. Both male and female receive undifferentiated commands from the Lord: to rule and reign over creation, and to multiply and fill the earth. They are equal manifestations of the *imago Dei*: concerning activity, they are equal recipients of the divinely-given mission; concerning community, they are equal participants in a divinely-created relationship; concerning status, they are equal stewards of a divinely-delegated authority over his creation.⁴

The very mode of woman's creation portrays her comprehensive equality to the man. The Lord created the woman to mitigate the man's solitude, to provide community in relationship. Rather than creating her out of the dust of the earth as he did the man, the Lord fashions her out of the man's side. In Hebrew thought, this signified the man's rational powers; woman shared in man's capacity for comprehension, reason, and agency.⁵ She is of the same substance as the man, in every way related and corresponding to him. Even the event of naming the woman confirms this: woman is both of

³Portions of this article appeared in "Recovering the Communion of Persons: How Hebrew Anthropology Counters Aristotelian Thought Concerning Male and Female Roles," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 44–59.

⁴The manner in which male and female express their authority over creation is intrinsic to their relationship to each other. While the man and the woman had equal authority over creation in Genesis 1-2, they did not necessarily have identical authority over each other.

⁵Earle Bennett Cross, *The Hebrew Family: A Study in Historical Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 42. Within Hebrew thought, emotional affections were located in the bowels.

man, yet not man (Gen 2:18–25). Man could neither disparage her person nor dismiss her intellect or personhood without despising himself—and what man ever despised himself (Eph 5:29)?

This relational emphasis is consistent with the rest of written revelation. From the first moments of creation to history's culmination, Scripture reveals a relational deity. God created humanity in male and female forms in his image, not out of necessity—the Godhead subsisted in perfect fellowship within himself—but from love, and for his glory. More specifically, he created humanity so that they would know his love and his glory in a relationship unlike any other of his creatures. They were his family (Isa 43:6–7). As humanity is created in his image, they are likewise relational. The Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:27–29 instructed the man and the woman to fill the earth and multiply—to increase the family. Thereafter, the Lord continues to reveal himself and his work in relational terms. He calls himself the Father of Israel, an indissoluble family bond (Gen 12:1–3; Exod 4:22–23). The marital union, a relationship unique among all other familial and social affiliations, was a metaphor portraying his covenant faithfulness of Yahweh to Israel and his anguish over Israel's spiritual infidelity (Jer 3:14; Hos 2:16). Israel's mediatorial ministry to the surrounding nations was intended to bring pagans into relationship with Israel's God (Isa 19:16–25; 43:10–12).

This relational prominence continues in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus grounds the motivation for obedience in love for God. The Apostle Paul predicates personal holiness upon one's right relationship with God (Romans 6). The Apostle John establishes one's relational union with Christ as the impetus for one's purification (1 John 3:3). The Great Commission entails acting as God's ministers of reconciliation for the expansion of his family. Even the fulfillment of the Law—that we would love the Lord our God with the totality of our being and love our neighbor as ourselves—is a fundamentally relational command. And the consummation of the present age is the marital union between the Lord and his people. Within the metanarrative of Scripture, God reveals himself in relational terms.

By allowing this relational theme of Scripture to inform our reading of the creation narrative, we discover the meaning of mankind as male and female with greater insight. The creation story in Genesis 1–2 grounds human identity and personhood in terms

of relationship. Although the substance of the *imago Dei* includes various definitions and approaches, humanity's potential for relationship with God constitutes the most unique aspect of being created in his image.⁶ John F. Kilner identifies God's purpose for creating humanity as connection and reflection; the Lord intended humanity to know him in a special connection and reflect his attributes such that God receives glory and his people flourish as he intended.⁷ The Lord's relational motivation for creating contrasted with the deities of other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Tom Holland contrasts the creative impulse of Yahweh with the Babylonian god, Marduk. The pagan deity created humanity to fulfill the work he was unwilling to do. Yahweh, however, created humanity to know him, to be in relationship with him.

The sexual differentiation between male and female is not merely functional or reproductive. John Paul II in his work *Theology of the Body* describes the significance of the male-female relationship as the "nuptial meaning of the body." The body is a gift, one that subsumes the whole person. To fulfill the body's nuptial meaning, both male and female mutually give themselves to create a "communion of persons."⁸ This communion is a dynamic relationship in which both male and female mutually realize the significance of their gendered bodies as embodied gifts to each other.

The character and expression of their respective sexualities (i.e., masculinity and femininity) are inextricably established by their sexual differentiation. The differences between male and female constitute what J. Budziszewski calls "polaric complementarity," a corresponding oppositeness that reflects interdependence and congruence.⁹ This polaric complementarity enables both male and female to comprehend themselves through comprehending each other.

⁶Other understandings of the *imago Dei* contain a relational underpinning: the functional view reflects humanity's positional relationship to the Lord in comparison to all other creation (Gen 1:27); conscience or moral law presumes humanity's instinctive knowledge of right and wrong and consequently accountability to a personal God (Rom 1:18–23).

⁷John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 228.

⁸John Paul, II, *Theology of the Body in Simple Language* (Philokalia Books, 2008), 19. John Paul II discusses at length how the celibate person also fulfills the nuptial meaning of the body by being "married" to God (168, 173).

⁹J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2012), 38–40. Not merely do biologically quantifiable brain differences between male and female exist, but they exist in corresponding ways, the differences of one balancing what the other lacks (41).

Within the woman, man recognizes himself. He understands himself through her corresponding similarities and difference. Gerhard Müller describes this as among the reasons God created sexual differentiation: “In sexual difference...each of the two can only understand himself or herself in light of the other: the male needs the female to be understood, and the same is true for the female.”¹⁰ In other words, the man understands himself by understanding what he is not and vice versa. Man cannot comprehend his identity as a man apart from woman and vice versa; both masculinity and femininity find their meaning in contradistinction to one another.¹¹ One cannot know the meaning of one’s gendered self apart from relationship. John Paul II explains, “Femininity is found in relation to masculinity and masculinity is confirmed in femininity. They depend on each other.” Ross Hastings asserts the relationality between male and female is constituted in both unity and “differentiated, complementary, noninterchangeable plurality.... *It is otherness and oneness. Otherness in oneness.*”¹²

III.

This self-understanding through relational correspondence has been described as an “I-Thou” way of relating.¹³ Just as God is not alone in himself, human beings image God by an *analogia relationis* (analogy of relation).¹⁴ This relationship personified the imago Dei in a manner that individual man could not in isolation, what Karl Barth called, “being in encounter.”¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains:

¹⁰Gerhard Müller, “An Opening to the Mystery of God,” in *Not Just Good, But Beautiful: The Complementarity Relationship Between Man and Woman*, ed. Steven Lopes and Helen Alvaré (Walden, NY: Plough, 2015), 12.

¹¹John Paul, II, *Theology of the Body*, 16.

¹²Ross Hastings, “The Trinity and Human Sexuality: Made in the Image of God,” *Crux* 53, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 15.

¹³Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 185. The analogy between God and man [*imago Dei*] is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.” The I-Thou motif originates with Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner, 1970).

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. deGruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 65. Bonhoeffer contrasts this with an *analogia entis* (analogy of being). The “freedom” of God that human beings image reflects God’s ability to be free *for* another. “The creature is free in that one creature exists in relation to another creature, in that one being is free for another human being” (66).

¹⁵The analogy between God and man [*imago Dei*] is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/1*, 185. “Hence humanity is the determination of our being as a being in encounter with the other man.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2*, 248. “The only

“Human beings exist in duality, and it is in this *dependence on the other that their creatureliness exists*.”¹⁶ The relational interdependence in which human beings exist is the *analogia relationis*. Thus, human beings cannot image God fully apart from an “in-dependence-upon-one-another” relationship.¹⁷ As humanity images God with their being, and as sexual differentiation is not only functional but also relational, created sexual differentiation itself images the divine.

Likewise, as all creation reveals the existence of a Creator, sex differentiation between male and female comprises general revelation, part of the natural world that proclaims the reality of an intelligent designer and his attributes. Hastings explains, “The fact that humans are sexual beings in a binary way, that they are beings who are not interchangeable with respect to sex, says something particular about who God is.”¹⁸ In other words, the sexed body is significant because it images God.¹⁹ The physical creation contains a spiritual meaning.²⁰ Humanity is like God in its relationality, yet unlike God in interdependence. According to Leslie Cook, a human being’s gender, signified by the human body, reinforces the theological belief that humans are distinct from the divine. She claims that “gender, represented through the body, is a symbol of difference. God is undifferentiated unity.”²¹ As Rabbi Ghatan describes, one gender without the other would bring “destruction to the world.”²² Both male and female qualities are necessary for the benefit of humanity. For Ghatan, the Hebrew concept of sex differentiation obviates competition between male and female: “The question of whether

real differentiation and relationship is that of man to man, and in its original and not concrete form of man to woman and woman to man. Man is no more solitary than God. But as God is One, and He alone is God, so man as man is one and alone, and two only in the duality of his kind, i.e., in the duality of man and woman. In this way he is a copy and imitation of God. In this way he repeats in his confrontation of God and himself the confrontation in God.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 186. This is not to say that individual humanity does not fully image God. The image of God is not contingent upon relationship, but it is manifested in relationship.

¹⁶Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 64. Italics original.

¹⁷Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 64.

¹⁸Hastings, “Trinity and Human Sexuality,” 13.

¹⁹Hastings, “Trinity and Human Sexuality,” 13.

²⁰Lisa Aiken, *To Be a Jewish Woman* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1992), 27.

²¹Leslie Cook, “Body Language: Woman’s Rituals of Purification in the Bible and Mishnah,” in *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life*, ed. Rahel R. Wasserfall (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 42.

²²Yedidiah H. E. Ghatan, *The Invaluable Pearl: The Unique Status of Women in Judaism* (New York: Bloch, 1986), 42.

man is superior to woman or vice versa is totally irrelevant. Either sex without the other is incomplete.”²³ Again, this pertains not only to reproductive capacity but also to relational completion.

Further, the sexual differentiation between male and female and the unbreakable bond intended by the marital union didactically illustrate God and his own covenant faithfulness. Hastings explains, “Humanity functions as co-humanity in its being male and female together, and by humans being male or female individually. Human relationality structured in this sexual binary manner has correspondence to God and his covenant partner.”²⁴ Human sexuality and its complementarity between male and female also portrays the perfect union God has within the Godhead. Peter Kreeft identifies this as the reason for the power and uniqueness of sexual passion: “Human sexuality is that image [of God], and human sexuality is a foretaste of that self-giving, that losing and finding the self, that oneness-in-manyness that is the heart of the life and joy of the Trinity... We love the other sex because God loves God.”²⁵

This relationality-preceding-functionality—the “communion of persons”—relates to the other as a living “Thou,” rather than a static “It.” Thus, within the male-female relationship, failure to relate to one another in a communion of persons produces failure to comprehend fully the nature of one’s identity as male or female. This “I-Thou” connection—*analogia relationis*—is not mutually exclusive to what may be identified as “roles” in the sense of sex-specific responsibilities and ways of relating; on the contrary, the I-Thou finds its expression in relationships particular to one’s personhood as male or female.²⁶

Further, equality does not entail indistinguishability. The relational complementarity between male and female is both biological and gendered. The creation account reveals the human body is neither incidental nor accidental to gender identity.²⁷ Genesis 1 uses the Hebrew terms *zakar* (male) and *neqebah* (female) to depict their sexual

²³Ghatan, *Invaluable Pearl*, 43. Cf. 1 Cor 11:11–12.

²⁴Hastings, “Trinity and Human Sexuality,” 14.

²⁵Peter Kreeft, “Is There Sex in Heaven?” in *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven but Never Dreamed of Asking* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 132.

²⁶Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 297, 310-11. Within this mutuality, Barth explains the analogical relationship between God and Israel, Christ and the Church. “This basic order of the human established by God’s creation is not accidental or contingent.”

²⁷By “gender identity,” I do not mean the idea that one may determine the gender with which one subjectively identifies. Rather, I mean the gender that one’s biology empirically signifies.

differentiation while Genesis 2 includes the words *ish* (man) and *ishah* (woman) to reflect their gender differentiation. These pairs of terms relate *zakar* to *ish* and *neqebah* to *ishah*. To be a *zakar* makes one an *ish*. To be a *neqebah* makes one an *ishah*. At the risk of inviting the charge of anachronism, this linguistic nuance contradicts the cultural belief that one's biological sex and one's gender are unrelated, and confirms the culturally anathema idea that gender is binary. To be sure, biological sex and gender are not *identical* aspects of one's humanity—sex is a primarily reproductive descriptor, while gender is a relational one—but they are indeed *correlative* aspects. From this, we may deduce that one's biological sex indicates and corresponds to one's gender such that both are binary. The sexed body is indivisible from gendered self. On this point, we must elaborate.

IV.

An increasingly accepted yet empirically unestablished belief claims one's sex is unrelated to and divisible from one's gender. According to this ideology, a person who is born male but believes himself to be a woman has a legitimate cause to conform his outer life to his inner "feminized" self and to expect society to do the same. The psychological condition is known as gender dysphoria, in which a person's biology does not coincide with a person's gender identity, causing distress.²⁸ The gender dysphoric person may attempt to achieve external conformity to his internal self through socialized gender expressions, (one's name, personal pronouns, manner of dress and appearance), medical treatments (hormonal therapies), and/or surgical procedures (breast implants, mastectomy, hysterectomy, vaginoplasty, orchiectomy, phallectomy, phalloplasty, and womb transplant).

Transgender advocates substantiate their belief that biological sex and gender identity are divisible by claiming gender is merely a social construct. Males have been socialized into behaving in characteristically masculine ways, females in feminine ways. Remove these social influences and a child is free from the constraints of conforming to external expectations. Hence, the so-called progressive trends like gender-neutral parenting and countries offering a

²⁸"What Is Gender Dysphoria?" American Psychiatric Association, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>.

non-binary option on birth certificates.²⁹ Validating gender dysphoria is considered a civil right.³⁰ In some cases, pubescent children are undergoing hormone replacement therapies to alter their natural sexual development.³¹

However, contrary to common parlance, one's sex is not "assigned at birth," but rather identified as that which corresponds to biology. Paul McHugh, University Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical School, insists one's sex is biologically unalterable. "People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women."³² To collaborate with one's gender dysphoria is, in McHugh's words, "to collaborate with and promote a mental disorder."³³

Intrinsic in transgender ideology is the conviction that gender is, at its core, a feeling. In his work, *When Harry Became Sally*, Ryan Anderson notes the epistemological questions transgenderism creates. How does one "know" the embodied experience of the other sex? As Anderson notes, "The claim of a biological male that he is 'a woman stuck in a man's body presupposes that someone who has a man's body, a man's brain, a man's sexual capacities, and a man's DNA can *know* what it's like to *be* a woman."³⁴ The remaining "proof" appears to be one's identification with and affinity for stereotyped expressions of gender identity.³⁵ In other words, the expression of gender is regarded as the essence of gender.

²⁹ArielJao, "Gender'X':OntarioIssuesItsFirst'NonBinary'BirthCertificate,"NBCNews,May9,2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/gender-x-ontario-issues-its-first-ever-non-binary-birth-n872676>.

³⁰Adam Liptak, "Civil Rights Law Protects Gay and Transgender Workers, Supreme Court Rules," *New York Times*, updated June 16, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/us/gay-transgender-workers-supreme-court.html>.

³¹Jason Rafferty, "Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents," *Pediatrics* 142, no. 4 (2018); "Pubertal Blockers for Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth," Mayo Clinic, August 16, 2019, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gender-dysphoria/in-depth/pubertal-blockers/art-20459075>; Michelle Cretella, "I'm a Pediatrician. How Transgender Ideology Has Infiltrated My Field and Produced Large-Scale Child Abuse," *The Daily Signal*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2017/07/03/im-pediatrician-transgender-ideology-infiltrated-field-produced-large-scale-child-abuse/>.

³²Ryan T. Anderson, "*The New York Times* Reveals Painful Truths about Transgender Lives," *Public Discourse*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/11/47220/>.

³³Anderson, "*Times* Reveals."

³⁴Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Movement* (New York: Encounter, 2018), 104.

³⁵Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 104.

Moreover, that gender identity is socially formed and expressed does not entail that it has nothing to do with the body. In his book, *On The Meaning of Sex*, J. Budziszewski notes gender identity “must be disciplined and stewarded; it is not in itself a separate reality of one’s being to be followed without critical thought or question.”³⁶ Gender identity is influenced, directed, and formed. Even the gender dysphoric person relies on *some* type of community to validate his or her sense of self.

Consider the research presented by Lisa Littman, assistant professor at the Brown University School of Public Health. Littman endeavored to explain the relative phenomena of an increasing and sudden prevalence of gender dysphoria among adolescents, teenagers who had previously expressed no gender dysphoric symptoms. The condition, known as Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria revealed an unexpected—and in certain corners, unwelcome—pattern. Littman discovered the influence of an adolescent’s relationships directly affected her gender identity. The phenomenon had a social cause. Among adolescents with Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria, 87 percent had friends who announced themselves as gender dysphoric, had saturated themselves with material on niche websites discussing gender dysphoria, or both.³⁷ In other words, a condition believed to find its source and validation in one’s intrinsic sense of self has extrinsic factors.³⁸ Additionally, a majority had also experienced some sort of psychological trauma within the last twelve months, including sexual abuse or assault, serious illness, their parents’ divorce, bullying, or moving to a new school.³⁹ Expressing gender dysphoria became a coping mechanism to distract from the source of distress. When Littman identified Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria as a peer contagion, she effectively confirmed that it is, at least in part, socially influenced. In other words, the gender dysphoric individual’s gender dysphoria may itself be a type of social construction.

As we uphold a biblically sound view of mankind as male and

³⁶Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 41.

³⁷Lisa Littman, “Parent Reports of Adolescents and Young Adults Perceived to Show Signs of a Rapid Onset of Gender Dysphoria,” *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 8; August 16, 2018, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>.

³⁸Katie McCoy, “Gender, Sexuality, and Family in the Context of Baptist Witness in Society,” paper presented at Research Institute for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Dallas, TX, 2018.

³⁹Littman, “Parent Reports.”

female, we must unwaveringly maintain that our identities are indivisible from our bodies. Biological sex and gender identity are created aspects of our significance as God's image bearers, created aspects that he calls "good." These two aspects of our humanity—sex and gender—were intended to coincide in wholeness. Employing Kilner's two-fold purpose for humanity, one's biological sex and one's corresponding gender image God in a way that connects us to him and reflects his attributes. In light of this, we must affirm the logically simple yet culturally subversive claim that one cannot choose one's gender. The idea that an *ish* may not be a *zakar* and an *ishah* may not be a *neqebah* reflects the fractured and distorted self-image caused by our sinful world. Even more, it reflects the attempts of God's rebellious image bearers to suppress the truth that nature reveals about God.

We are more than our embodied sex, yet we cannot be separated from our embodied sex.⁴⁰ Christianity gives us the framework to affirm that our bodies and reproduction are good yet not ultimate.⁴¹ Andrew Walker clarifies: "Maleness isn't only anatomy but anatomy shows that there is maleness. And femaleness isn't only anatomy, but anatomy shows that there is femaleness. Men and women are more than just their anatomy, but they are not less. Our anatomy tells us what gender we are. Our bodies do not lie to us."⁴² We may also affirm that both one's maleness or femaleness and one's manhood or womanhood are created and bestowed aspects of our identities as God's image bearers. To reject this relationship between sex and gender is but a resurrected form a Gnosticism,⁴³ a devaluation, and consequently, a denigration of the body.⁴⁴ Thus, men and women are neither composites of their biology nor abstractions from their biology. Our sexed bodies are neither accidental nor incidental to our gendered selves. Both are given by God to image himself in holistic relationality.

Transgender persons should elicit our compassion. No social

⁴⁰Hastings, "Trinity and Human Sexuality," 10

⁴¹Angela Franks, "Andrea Long Chu Says You Are a Female, and He's Only Partly Wrong," Public Discourse, December 10, 2019, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/12/58719/>.

⁴²Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (The Good Book Company, 2017), 54, cf. 50-51.

⁴³Craig Carter, "The New Gender Gnostics," *Eikon* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 28-39.

⁴⁴Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

adaptation or surgical procedure will achieve the sense of wholeness they seek. The staggering suicide rate among sex-reassignment recipients is proof. What is inwardly broken has no outward cure. Whether one's psychological distress is symptomatic of another source of pain or the effect of living in a fallen world, the transgender person's hunger for meaning finds its satisfaction only in the satisfaction of Christ on our behalf. Apart from a reconciled relationship with our Creator, we will never comprehend, much less fulfill, the significance of our sexed bodies, our gendered selves, or our relationality with others.

V.

Evangelical discourse preoccupied with prescribing specific roles may, however unwittingly, neglect the relational emphasis within Christian anthropology. A "role" is an extrinsic property; a relationship is an intrinsic reality. One can adopt or suspend a role like a task or a function. Yet the nature of male or female is not a static position but rather an active relationship, one in which two persons relate to one another as a "Thou" not an "It." One's identity as a man or a woman reflects the intricate wholeness of personhood, one that is neither reduced to one's biological sex nor separate from one's biological sex. To condense the relationship to terms of roles reduces the complexity and comprehensiveness of the maleness and femaleness to a function—to relating to the other as a depersonalized "It." Moreover, emphasizing roles over relationality risks displacing one's relationship with God as the defining factor of one's gender identity and replacing that defining factor with an interpersonal dynamic.

The relational character of sexual differentiation and gendered personhood requires man and woman to know one another primarily as relational persons (Thou), not as static positions (It). This being-in-encounter relationship is distinct from the inhabiting of a role, although the two are not mutually exclusive. This observation is not to dismiss the different ways of relating or relational responsibilities between male and female; Scripture's pattern of male headship in nuclear and spiritual families is clear. Rather, this point considers the idea of male-female roles primarily in terms of personal relationship, not the other way around.

With this in mind, I humbly offer the following definition of

biblical manhood and biblical womanhood. Biblical manhood constitutes a biologically born male who submits fully to God and his Word, allowing the precepts of biblical instruction and the implications of that spiritual posture to pervade every aspect of his life and relationships. Likewise, biblical womanhood constitutes a biologically born female who submits fully to God and his Word, allowing the precepts of biblical instruction and the implications of that spiritual posture to pervade every aspect of her life and relationships. The relative ambiguity and correspondence of these definitions stresses a twofold relational emphasis. First, the man or woman who aligns his or her life to biblical instruction will fulfill its gender-specific commands, thus embodying the significance of his or her biological sex and gender identity. One's relationship to the Lord determines one's relationship to the self and to others. Second, as a man or woman submits to and obeys God's commands—both to all Christians and to their respective genders—the Lord accomplishes and fulfills the meaning and significance of one's gender through one's interpersonal relationships. In other words, and at the risk of oversimplifying the issue, when we as men and women worship the Lord in obedience, he is the one who reveals and establishes the meaning of manhood and womanhood. We conform; he confirms.

Undoubtedly, a reader or two will object to such simplicity. Yet, consider the perennial efforts to delineate and stipulate gender roles in detail. Preoccupation with prescribing gender roles at the expense of human relationality quickly tends toward conflating culturally gendered activities with the essence and meaning of gender itself. In other words, the gender expression of manhood constitutes the essence of manhood; the gender expression of womanhood constitutes the essence of womanhood. In this way, overzealous complementarian discourse risks committing a similar fallacy as transgenderism: conflating the essence of gender with the expression of gender. Grounding gender differentiation in relationship rather than roles protects sound complementarian theology from devolving into disproportionate concern over gender expression. This is not to denigrate the importance of practicing cultural sensitivity and outwardly behaving in a way that reflects one's acknowledgement of his or her created gender.⁴⁵ Rather, it is to demonstrate that complementarian discourse can

⁴⁵First Corinthians 11:2–16 addresses this point.

become so preoccupied with stipulating specific gender roles that it misses the significance of relationality.

Further, in a culture increasingly receptive to the idea that gender is a subjective feeling, expressed exclusively by behaviors (i.e., roles), complementarian discourse jeopardizes its own convictions if it fails to emphasize a relationality that is inseparable from the sexed body and holistic to the gendered self. But to emphasize gender distinctions as respective ways of relating safeguards our theological discourse from devolving into a preoccupation with specific tasks, functions, or cultural expressions. By amplifying the communion of confrontation with a “Thou,” we represent the fellowship of Hebrew marriage and the sex differentiation and gender complementarity described in Genesis 1–2.

Grounding gender differences in relationship prior to roles further allows us to maintain that male headship is a relational responsibility by which one bears greater accountability rather than a superior role with which one wields greater control. This permits the possibility of a marriage that both fulfills Scripture’s relational pattern and varies in social roles.⁴⁶ In contrast, to ascribe approval or disapproval of a marital relationship according to whether it conforms to culturally dominant norms of gender expression reflects a paradigm in which male and female fulfill a role rather than express a relationship. To reiterate, this in no way eschews the biblically established pattern of male headship in the family and the church. Nor does this approach intend to dismiss the relationship of man as spiritual authority and woman as corresponding helper in marriage (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:22–33). Rather, this distinction proposes that we present and discuss this pattern to reflect the relational nature of man as male and female prior to stipulating gendered expressions.

Finally, grounding gender differences in relationship prior to roles also frees us from associating certain virtues with gender. A virtuous man will be meek, tenderhearted, and gentle. A virtuous woman will be resolute, bold, and steadfast. While the virtues themselves

⁴⁶For instance, consider a couple that chooses to invest in their children’s education through homeschooling. Both parents are vocationally capable of earning the income the family needs. But the father, a professional educator, is more qualified to direct his children’s education. So, both parents agree that the mother will work fulltime so the father can invest in their children’s future academic success. Is the father abdicating his role to provide and lead, or is the mother failing to make her family a priority by working outside the home? Perhaps the answer will depend on whether one understands headship as a relationship or a function.

are not gendered characteristics, the expression of these virtues may correlate to the gender of the person who possesses them.⁴⁷ This point also frees us from assessing one's manliness or womanliness by the degree to which they possess specific virtues relative to other persons and, instead, relates all virtue as an expression of one's relationship to God (2 Pet 1:3–11).⁴⁸ This, too, protects our theological convictions regarding male and female from being reduced to gendered behaviors.

Our created identities as male or female are indispensable to and inseparable from our identities as God's image bearers. If our public witness is to be effective, we must underscore human relationality prior to gender roles. A compelling and cogent defense of the relational intent of male and female provides the platform upon which we may display our relational God, whom we reflect in both our equality and our distinction, our wholeness and our difference. Our world is spiraling into confusion over and celebrating the destruction of our sexed bodies and our gendered selves. May we, as ambassadors of Christ himself, not be entangled in the secondary squabbles over specific roles but be found faithful to proclaim and embody the holistic relationality through which male and female find their meaning.



⁴⁷A woman is no less feminine because she is brave, yet she not does suspend her femininity in displaying bravery. In the same way, a man does not suspend his masculinity by displaying kindness or nurture.

⁴⁸More research and work is needed on the difference between complementarity and gender essentialism. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss, but I hope a curious mind will take on the philosophical question. Edith Stein describes the biblical paradigm between the male/female relationship as complementarity without polarity; the way of relating does not consist of opposite traits and characteristics to be divided and maintained. Rather, in relationship, both man and woman integrate character traits of the other gender, and in so doing, guard themselves from hyper-femininity or hyper-masculinity. In other words, in self-giving, self-revealing relationship, both male and female fulfill the meaning of their respective gender identities. See Edith Stein, *Edith Stein Essays on Women*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1996), 36–40.