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TEOLOGISKA  
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# **In the image of God he created them**

A comparative study in theology on gender

Bachelors Thesis in TL 233, 15hp  
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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss and give suggestions for theological perspectives on gender. It attempts to answer the question: What constitutes a theologically informed view on gender? It does so by comparing two books and one article by theologians Adrian Thatcher and Elaine Storkey. Guiding the comparison is a theoretical perspective borrowed from Daniel Migliore's theological anthropology. This brings up the tension of human embodiment and world-openness in human nature. The results of the comparison are then discussed from different angles. The conclusion is that gender is based on that male and female are created as sexed human beings in the image of God. It also shows that gender is a relational term, describing the relationship between sexed human beings. The Bible only gives us a human relational ideal, not a masculine/feminine one, which is based on how Christ and the Trinity are and how they relate.

Keywords: *Gender, theology, sex, imago dei, relationality, embodiment, world-openness, trinity, imago Christi*

## Abbreviations

<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version
<i>OED</i>	Oxford English Dictionary Online
<i>SGBV</i>	Sex and Gender Based Violence
<i>OCCT</i>	Oxford Companion to Christian Thought

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Foreword

In Swedish society, and as I am sure in the West at large, sexual identity and gender has been one of the hot issues discussed and debated in recent years. The focus was mainly on sexuality, for example homosexuality, and rights for this group. Whatever stance Christians take on homosexuality and other sexualities, it is positive how abused, mistreated and rejected people have received more acknowledgement and recognition in the public arena. Not to mention several major victories for these groups, the legalization of same-sex marriage in the USA 2015 being a big symbolic victory for the same-sex movement.<sup>1</sup>

However, maybe events such as these have led to further the discussion on identity. Now the discussion about identity seems to have moved from sexuality to gender (social sex). In this process the gender-binary has come into question, whether there is only man and woman as a gender. Anna Lagerblad at Svenska Dagbladet questions the gender binary and points to how some people today identify as a gender outside the gender binary, as well as how different cultures have had other genders, and therefore we should accept more gender identities. Even though I do not find these specific arguments compelling; that just because someone identifies as “x” gender it should be made normative, it is still important to listen to these people who often are marginalized. A more interesting aspect that Lagerblad brings up are the biological factors involved.<sup>2</sup> Especially considering the 0.05-1.7% of human babies born worldwide with intersex traits not knowing fully whether they are a boy or a girl, as United Nations Office of the High Commission of Human Rights informs.<sup>3</sup> The gender identity questions are clearly worth pursuing and discussing. However recent developments have aided in not just adding one or two gender identities but many more. A sign of this is how the social media site Facebook has added 70 different gender identities to choose from when choosing gender according to SVT.<sup>4</sup>

Where does the list of gender identities end and is this expanding list a good thing? This is part of the idea of the individual choosing which gender they want to be, regardless of biological or other factors. This is something Olof Edsinger points out in an article in Göteborgsposten and adds

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<sup>1</sup> About the legalization see following article: BBC News 2015, n.p. Online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33290341>.

<sup>2</sup> Lagerblad 2017, n.p. Online: <https://www.svd.se/tjej-eller-kille-biologiskt-kon-ar-mer-komplext-an-vad-mangator>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office of High Commission of Human Rights 2018, 1. Online: <https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Intersex-English.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> SVT, 2015, online: <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/nu-kan-du-vara-en-hen-pa-facebook>.

other important aspects. He argues that not knowing one's gender, especially for children and young people who are in a state of development, can be confusing and cause insecurity. For some he also adds, this insecurity takes the form of gender dysphoria, an even more confusing and painful state.<sup>5</sup> I agree that the confusion and insecurity which dissolved gender roles can bring is a problem, and this is one of the reasons why I seek to engage with this topic.

In considering my Christian faith, I have been wondering what the Bible and Christian theology can contribute to a better Christian understanding of the relationship between sex and gender. This in turn is the underlying question of the debate in the biological, sociological and psychological arena – how much is gender dependent on biological sex? Is gender a social construct formed by culture and language? Or is gender merely an extension of our biology, and to what degree? Another take on the topic comes from gender theorists like Judith Butler who argues that gender is something we choose with our actions, we perform gender.<sup>6</sup> My aim is not to come up with an answer to these question in the fields of psychology, sociology or biology, my focus is how gender and sex correlate in Christian theology. However, these questions create the underlying platform from which I compare the work of two Christian authors talking about gender and theology. I also need to inform the reader that I come from a position of wanting a better understanding of the relationship between biology and gender rather than sympathizing with gender being a social construction. Therefore I am, as anyone writing in a hermeneutical science, biased. My intention however is to try to get a bigger picture, drawing on both sides of the spectrum, not to argue for a connection between biology and gender but how one can learn from different theological perspectives.

## **1.2 Question formulation and purpose**

From the background of the contemporary debate about gender and identity my aim for this dissertation is to discuss and give suggestions for theological perspectives on gender. This research will be done in systematic theology and concern theological anthropology, since gender concerns our identity as humans and being created in the image of God. Further, the contemporary debate about gender is often focused on gender being based on biology or constructed by culture. There are also those who see gender as something chosen and performed. In other words, what are the building blocks of gender? I will pursue a similar question in the domain of systematic theology: *What constitutes a theologically informed view on gender?*

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<sup>5</sup> Edsinger 2018, n.p. Online: [www.gp.se/debatt/transideologin-är-en-fara-för-våra-barn-och-unga-1.5251410](http://www.gp.se/debatt/transideologin-är-en-fara-för-våra-barn-och-unga-1.5251410).

<sup>6</sup> Butler 1990, 25, 33.

### **1.3 Focus and scope**

In the search for theological perspectives on gender and to understand what a theologically informed view on gender constitutes, the resources are not abundant. There are a lot of theological works written on gender but not so many with the aim to pick gender apart and find its components. It may be that discussing gender has become more prevalent in recent years and theology has not quite caught up yet. Theologians writing about theology and gender are, like many, influenced by current understandings of gender. Some of these views are gender rooted in biology, as a social construct or being performative, which will be introduced more in chapter two. This is good to keep in mind.

Gender as something rooted in biological sex of male and female is brought up in many works about the role's men and women has in marriage, community and church. This is exemplified in the complementarian versus egalitarian debate, which concerns the roles of men and women, but that is not my aim to explore. Nonetheless, I assume and work from an egalitarian position, in that both men and women can have the same roles and positions in leadership. It has been hard to find theology about gender as a social sex from evangelicals, and it may be that they are invested in this previously mentioned debate polarized between the two positions, according to Elaine Storkey.<sup>7</sup> There is also theology written about sexuality, discussing for example homosexuality, bisexuality and intersex. That is however not what I have chosen to study. Some works on systematic theology dealing with anthropology touch on the topic of gender, quite often by feminist theologians, and some theology from these kinds of works have primarily been consulted in this dissertation. Additionally, I have not chosen to investigate how sin may or may not be a part of the formation of gender identity.

Theology written about the roles of men and women as well as sexuality can yield valuable insights on gender, but it doesn't wrestle with the definition of gender and gender-identities beyond men and women. My aim in this dissertation is not to give a presentation of what it is to be male or female, rather my focus is to theologically unpack the meaning of gender and from that give theological perspectives on gender.

### **1.4 Method and theoretical perspectives**

In this section my aim is to present the theoretical perspective used to analyze the material in chapter three of this dissertation. This section also shows the method chosen to review the material.

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<sup>7</sup> Storkey 2007, 165.



### 1.4.1 Theoretical perspective

The theoretical perspective used includes three theological analytical questions which will work as the lens upon reviewing the material. The analytical questions are created to give a foundation for answering the main question. The theory and its analytical questions are built upon parts of reformed theologian Daniel Migliore's theological anthropology about the *Imago dei*, which I argue brings a dynamic perspective to the topic of gender. I use two categories of Migliore's take on the image of God: *embodiment* and *world-openness*. These terms will be explained further shortly.

First off, concerning human embodiment, Migliore talks about the human existence by acknowledging that humans are holistic beings, not separated souls or bodies but both at the same. In other words, we are created as pneumopsychosomatic beings. He also reasons that humans are conditioned by culture, history and social context.<sup>8</sup> A part of this social context is other humans, the rest of creation and God, Migliore argues that "...human existence is communal, not individualistic".<sup>9</sup> Human embodiment thus relates to several factors that are intrinsic parts of our existence, our soul-bodies, social context, culture and history. In contrast to the different explanations of gender given in the field of psychology, being rooted in either biology or culture, human embodiment includes all these aspects and more, if related to gender.

The next category is human world-openness, Migliore borrows this term from Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. This is the ability and desire to move further and beyond that of the limits and finitude of our embodied existence, an ability to transcend ourselves, according to Pannenberg.<sup>10</sup> He argues that the human, unlike other creatures of the earth, is not in the same way bound by her environment.<sup>11</sup> In human's unique ability to perceive reality in a limitless amount of ways and to see endless possibilities, she can create her own worlds and culture is an example of this according to Pannenberg.<sup>12</sup> World-openness thus consists of our imagination, to see endless possibilities, our creative powers and our free will, which enables us to create for example culture and if related to gender, personal gender identity. From this perspective humans can choose and create a gender identity based on the human imagination, creativity and free will regardless of the restrictions of our embodiment. World-openness therefore share similarities with Butler's idea of how we perform or act out our gender identity.<sup>13</sup> I will use the concept of world-openness (in relation to gender) as humans choosing their identity. This is seen as the foundation of gender. Human

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<sup>8</sup> Migliore 2004, 143–144.

<sup>9</sup> Migliore 2004, 144–145.

<sup>10</sup> Pannenberg 1994, 228–230.

<sup>11</sup> Pannenberg 1964, 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Pannenberg 1964, 5–9.

<sup>13</sup> Butler 1990, 25, 33.

world-openness and human embodiment is therefore a theological tension and when related to the topic of gender, gives different perspectives on what constitutes gender identity.

In concluding this section, the theory aims at exploring the tension between human's embodiment and world-openness, to get a dynamic perspective on the question of gender. The following questions are used to bring out this previously mentioned tension in the material:

How is human embodiment portrayed in relation to gender?

How is human world-openness portrayed in relation to gender?

How does human embodiment and world-openness correlate in relation to gender?

## 1.4.2 Method

Since systematic theology is a hermeneutical science, it is important to mention that I as the author bring my own presuppositions when reading, analyzing and interpreting material that is used in this dissertation. Any interpretation of a text comes with these difficulties, which is good to be aware of, as stated by theologian Björn Vikström.<sup>14</sup> To get an understanding of my prior knowledge and bias on the topic of gender see the foreword (section 1.1).

In this dissertation I will analyze and compare two books and one article from the theological perspective and its three analytical questions worked out in section 1.4.1. The texts will be read and analyzed inductively but with the theoretical perspective guiding this process. This analyzing method is similar to the one described by social scientists Göran Bergström and Kristina Boréus, called the dimensional method. The method focuses on finding a spectrum in a certain object of study (in this case anthropology, embodiment – world-openness) to use as a lens when studying the material.<sup>15</sup> After this the texts are compared. Part of this is to find out the similarities and differences of the texts in the framework of the theological perspective. Following this is a discussion regarding the data drawn from the comparison, where the aim is to respond to the main questions posed (see section 1.2). The discussion also brings in other perspectives to contribute to a better theological understanding of gender. From this discussion there is a conclusion, which relates to the contemporary questions brought up in in the foreword (1.1).

## 1.5 Material

The material analyzed in this dissertation are two books and one article, the book *Redeeming Gender* by Anglican British theologian Adrian Thatcher and the book *Men and Women: Created or Constructed? The Great Gender Debate* as well as the article *Evangelical Theology and Gender* by

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<sup>14</sup> Vikström 2005, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Bergstrom and Boréus (red) 2012, 156–157.

Evangelical British theologian Elaine Storkey. These texts will be reviewed through the lens of the analytical questions described in section 1.3.1. Thatcher's book is an academic theological book aiming to build a theology on gender. Storkey's book is not as academic and focuses on the debate of whether gender is created or constructed from a philosophical, social, political and theological viewpoint. Since the book is less theological and more philosophical, I have also chosen to use the previously mentioned article. The article has a more theological emphasis. All texts relate specifically to the topic of gender and theology but with different goals. I wanted perspectives from different traditions and angles which is why I choose Thatcher and Storkey, since I think this will give a more enriching discussion. Further, Thatcher and Storkey are also used as resources in chapter two since they both bring helpful insights to the complex topic of gender and sex. This is seen especially from a historical viewpoint. Much of the litterateur I have encountered does not show this to the same extent.

## 1.6 Research overview

An overview giving definitions of sex and gender as well as presenting different interpretations of gender from the perspective of psychology will be introduced in chapter two. The following text will focus on theological work done concerning the topic of gender. The scope of the literature chosen is led by the purpose of this dissertation. Because of this some material that might give possible insights have not been included. This is explained in section 1.2. The literature introduced below is by no means an exhaustive list but presents valuable contributions regarding a theological understanding of gender.

Concerning the Christian interpretation of gender and sexuality through history, the creation account in Genesis chapter 1-3 remains important across denominational boundaries, as Tina Beattie shows. She also notes that the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter two has been given greater importance than of the creation of male and female in the image of God in chapter one.<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Roberts points out that men have been seen as leaders over women, and women viewed as inferior, which has received a lot of criticism, the majority coming from feminist theology.<sup>17</sup> That men were created before women and that women were first to fall for temptation is used as an arguments to legitimize female subordination under men, according to Beattie.<sup>18</sup> Roberts points out that there is no well-developed contemporary theology for manhood or the man, and be-

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<sup>16</sup> Beattie 2015, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts 2000, *OCCT*, 404–406.

<sup>18</sup> Beattie 2015, 40.

cause of the feminist critique of the traditional Christian interpretation of manhood, the theology that exists has developed more in response to the critique than on its own.<sup>19</sup>

Other scriptures that often are brought up when discussing gender are some of the household codes of the New Testament, Col 3:18-19, Eph 5:22-33, 1 Tim 2:8-15, Titus 2:1-8 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. However, the most common scripture discussed, especially by gender theorist, is Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.<sup>20</sup>

Further, a major influence today for understanding gender, and gender as something fundamentally connected to our biology was theologian Karl Barth. Barth argued that as humans we must be either male *or* female, those are the only possibilities.<sup>21</sup> The emphasis on the complementarity of male and female prevalent in Barth’s theology is also emphasized in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, shown by Medard Kehl and Werner Löser.<sup>22</sup> Both Barth and Balthasar have had a big impact on theology when discussing gender, especially catholic theology. Influential in Barth’s thinking has also been the relation understanding of the image of God (see chapter 4.7) with emphasis on God as trinity.

The catholic theologians platform for discussing gender is usually John Paul II systematic theology *Theology of the Body*, emphasizing the duality of male and female in the creation of humanity, whether they agree with him or not.<sup>23</sup> He also argues that the mystery of femininity is manifested and revealed fully in motherhood, which is expressed most ultimately through Mary. Eve is an archetype for womankind, Mary is the second and more complete type according to John Paul II.<sup>24</sup> This has parallels to how Paul refers to Christ as the second (or new) Adam (Rom 5:12-21). John Paul II also shows how the biblical bridal imagery reveals that the church as the bride includes both men and women but Christ, who is the bridegroom, is only male. From this reasoning (among other arguments) the catholic church only ordains male priests since they as men best represent Christ. In this we can see the polarity in creation between essentialized ideals of manhood in Christ and womanhood in Mary. Beattie notes that some female catholic theologians have sought to expand John Paul II theology, and this has created the movement called new feminism, which has its focus on the sexual and reproductive body.<sup>25</sup> Another observation is that evangelical theologians have not written so much about theology and gender but have been engaged with the egalitari-

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<sup>19</sup> Roberts 2000, *OCCT*, 404–406.

<sup>20</sup> The Bible translation used is the English Standard Version (ESV) which is used in the whole thesis.

<sup>21</sup> Barth 1961, 118.

<sup>22</sup> Kehl and Löser (red) 1982, 72–75.

<sup>23</sup> Wojtyła 1997, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Wojtyła 1997, 80–82.

<sup>25</sup> Beattie 2015, 38.

an/complementarian debate according to Storkey.<sup>26</sup> Focus has also been on theology about sexuality, especially the topic of homosexuality.

Further the relational rather than the structural view of the *imago dei* (for more info see chapter 4.7) has been more emphasized in recent theology, stressing a holistic and embodied view of humanity, according to theologian David Fergusson.<sup>27</sup> This is also confirmed by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen who among other theologians like Stanley Grenz and Daniel Migliore emphasize the relational view connected to God as trinity.<sup>28</sup> There is a shared understanding that there are several components to understanding identity by the theologians mentioned above but God as trinity in the relation *imago dei* remains central.

A lot of the current theology written about gender or in the borderlands of gender and sexuality is produced by feminist theologians, for example Susan Parsons, Tina Beattie, Lisa S. Cahill, Sarah Coakley, Linn M. Tonstad and Serene Jones. Most of these theologians, like Parsons in her *Feminist Theology as Dogmatic Theology* find set categorizations of gender problematic. She believes that the *Imago dei* is much more diverse and multifaceted than some portray it to be.<sup>29</sup>

Beattie in her *New Catholic Feminism* tries to find a middle way between contemporary feminist critique and catholic neo-orthodox theology, informed by the elements of the sacramentality of creation, prayer, faith and revelation to understand the body (the female in particular), which relates to both sex and gender.<sup>30</sup>

Cahill talks about gender roles among other things in her book *Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics* where feminist theory is used to critique gender roles. At the same time feminist theory is problematized because of its lack of ethical foundation which she believes the Christian ethics provide.<sup>31</sup>

Both Coakley, in *God Sexuality and the Self: Essays on the Trinity* and Tonstad in *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality and the Transformation of Gender* focus on how the trinity may aid a theological understanding of sexuality and gender.<sup>32</sup> Tonstad does this, critiquing the way it has been used by other theologians (like Coakley) and adds queer theory perspectives to the understanding of gender.<sup>33</sup>

Jones discusses several topics related to feminism in her *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace*, among these topics is gender. She examines whether it is something

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<sup>26</sup> Storkey 2007, *CCET*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Fergusson 2007, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 274–283.

<sup>29</sup> Parsons 2002, 125–126.

<sup>30</sup> Beattie 2006, 4–5.

<sup>31</sup> Cahill 1996, 1–3.

<sup>32</sup> Coakley 2013, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Tonstad 2016, 1.

essential or socially constructed in relation to human nature. She argues that a middle-position called *strategic essentialism* is preferable.<sup>34</sup>

Another work not done by a feminist theologian, but which also discusses the essentialism and constructivism is Josph Sverker's dissertation *Constructivism, Essentialism and the Between: Human Being and Vulnerability in Judith Butler, Steven Pinker, and Colin Gunton*. He concludes that the discussion reveals another tension, that the independent individual has become the ontological foundation for what being human is, rather than being a dependent and relational person to others and God.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.7 Disposition

Chapter two presents an introduction about the terms gender and sex, primarily from a psychological perspective. This includes definitions of the terms, historical meanings and contemporary interpretations of gender and possible epistemological views connected to these interpretations. I discern that these interpretations of gender, although secular, are good to be aware of since contemporary theologians cannot avoid their influence. Furthermore, chapter three consists of a presentation of the information gathered from the two books and the article respectively, guided by the theoretical perspective. There is a discussion of the conclusions from chapter three in chapter four, where other theological perspectives will be brought in from other theologians. The discussion will also respond to the main question and seeks to answer it. In chapter five the presents the conclusions of the thesis and will be related to the contemporary issues brought up in the foreword (1.1).

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<sup>34</sup> Jones 2000, 44.

<sup>35</sup> Sverker 2017, 252, 256.

# Chapter 2: Research Background

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at giving a background of secular interpretations of what gender is. The goal is to give a brief overview of dominating perspectives and not in any way a complete list of views available concerning gender.

This research overview, mainly focusing on sex and gender, first gives definitions of both sex and a historical overview. After this there is a thematically structured presentation of perspectives on gender. From a psychological point of view there is two major perceptions: Biological theorists (sometimes called biological essentialism) and social constructionists, this is backed up by Ester McGeeney, researcher in the field of sexuality, gender and youth culture and Laura Harvey, lecturer in sociology with focus on sexuality.<sup>36</sup> It is also confirmed by Sabra L. Katz-Wise, Assistant Professor in Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine and Janet S. Hyde, Professor of Psychology and Women's studies.<sup>37</sup> There is also a short presentation of Judith Butlers gender theory of performativity. Following this is an explanation of the different epistemologies that biological essentialism and social constructionism is based on since it is important to remember how they differ in their belief in how reality is constituted.

## 2.2 Definitions and history of sex and gender

### 2.2.1 Sex: Definition and history

Through history the term sex has had a range of meanings and still has. The Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED) gives several definitions of sex of which I will bring up three major ones. Sex can be used, which it also is commonly referred to, as a physical act of sex, sexual activity, sexual stimulation or intercourse between individuals.<sup>38</sup> According to the OED sex can also be viewed as a social and cultural phenomenon and its manifestations, especially regarding the interactions between the sexes which includes sexual motives, desires, instincts etcetera.<sup>39</sup>

The above definition shows something that other authors also point out, that the line between gender and sex is not always that clear. However, the primary definition listed by the OED for sex, is that sex constitutes two main categories of humans (male and female) and other living creatures

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<sup>36</sup> McGeeney and Harvey 2015, 153–155.

<sup>37</sup> Katz–Wise and Hyde 2014, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online 2008, online:  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176989?rskey=ZGI2YS&result=1#eid>.

<sup>39</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online 2008, online:  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176989?rskey=ZGI2YS&result=1#eid>.

which are structured into these on the basis of their reproductive functions. This is sometimes also referred to as biological sex. But on top of these categories, OED refer to sex as a third sex, which is an umbrella term for transsexuals, eunuchs and homosexual people (and in the English language, jokingly, clergymen).<sup>40</sup>

Most commonly we today consider there to be two sexes, male and female. However, Adrian Thatcher points out that during the major part of Christian history mankind has been viewed as one sex, that of man. According to Thatcher, female and male were viewed as two different categories of this same sex, like two positions within the same spectrum, referred to as the one-sex theory.<sup>41</sup> Further Thatcher highlights a Greek doctor called Galen (129-216 AD) from who we can pick up a belief even older than Galen himself, confirming and giving more information on the one-sex theory. Galen described the male and female to have the same set of genitals, only that the females were turned inward, into the body and men displaying them outside their body. In other words, a woman had both a penis and testicles, but they were turned inward. This view on human anatomy was held in the West as late as around 1750. Further, a significant influence on this view was Aristotelian thought, which considered man to consist of four substances. The male consisted of the substances of dry and hot and the female of cold and wet.<sup>42</sup> The male hotness was strongly linked to perfection, and according to historian Anthony Fletcher heat was the source of strength, and whether it was strength of mind, body or morality, strength was what made gender perfect.<sup>43</sup> The male body was, apart from its strength, also seen as more firm. Strength and firmness contributed to the male's greater ability in understanding and discernment.<sup>44</sup> In conclusion male and female were seen as sharing the same sex, man, but the male being superior. One might question why the male was hotter than the female, and why heat was linked to strength and perfection, but there seems to be no apparent answer to this.

It can be noted that even though male and female shared the same sex, in contrast to the view of two sexes today, the shared commonality of the one sex theory was likely eroded by the males superiority over the female, something which Thatcher agrees on.<sup>45</sup> We view the two sexes as opposite, the pre-modern world with the one sex theory did not, but they did look at male and female substances to be opposite. An important aspect to add from Thatcher to the one sex theory however, was that it was believed that males and females consisted of the same fluids. These fluids had the

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<sup>40</sup>Oxford English Dictionary Online 2008, online:  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176989?rskey=ZGI2YS&result=1#eid>.

<sup>41</sup> Thatcher 2011, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Thatcher 2011, 8–10.

<sup>43</sup> Fletcher 1995, xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Thatcher 2011, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Thatcher 2011, 12.



potential to change to other substances, which meant that males could become more like females and vice versa. What this looked like practically for males losing their masculinity was becoming the passive partner, the one penetrated, in sexual intercourse. For females losing their femininity it was becoming a too active partner in sexual intercourse, initiating and enjoying sex too much.<sup>46</sup> The two subcategories of sex, male and female, were then in a peculiar way viewed as flexible.

Something one could take away from this is pre-modern view of sex is that even when there were no sexual differences (or so they thought), there were still differences, which would be better described as differences in terms of gender. What we need to remember, looking back at history, is that we can never be too sure about our definitions about sex, some new facts previously not known might tweak our current the understanding.

### **2.2.2 Gender: definition and history**

The word Gender is derived, according to OED, from the French word *genre* which has encompassed a range of meanings, sort, kind, sex, race, people or the state of being male or female. Gender is also used as a grammatical term in certain Indo-European languages of labeling categories of nouns designated as either masculine, feminine, neuter or common. Further OED also show that the meaning of sex has changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from something referring to males or females as a biological group, and gender taking its place for this specific meaning. Instead sex has increasingly come to stand for sexual intercourse.<sup>47</sup> Arguably this is one of the things creating confusion between the term sex and gender. The OED also bring up the meaning of gender from the perspective of psychology and sociology, which follows:

The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex. Also: a (male or female) group characterized in this way.<sup>48</sup>

Similar to this definition is of the American Psychology Association, defining gender as “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex”<sup>49</sup>

Not everyone agrees on this however. Psycholinguist Steven Pinker shows that there are sex differences which have effects on our behavior and thinking and therefore on gender.<sup>50</sup> The ques-

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<sup>46</sup> Thatcher 2011, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online 2011, online:  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77468?rskey=0uZuOn&result=1#eid237082433>.

<sup>48</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2011, online:  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77468?rskey=0uZuOn&result=1#eid237082433>.

<sup>49</sup> Katz-Wise and Hyde 2014, 11.

tion is instead how much biology has a say and how much culture has a say to our understanding of gender.

Storkey shows that there have been and are different understanding of what gender is, this is characterized by the views of the pre-modern, modern and post-modern era. The Pre-modern era assumed sex and gender to be exactly the same thing, this was based on an assumed reductionistic biological essentialism. Women and men were total opposite and had their separate natures, this was partly justified by biology, as mentioned, but also as something part of God-ordained order.<sup>51</sup> In the modern era some of these assumptions were questioned, primarily by the rising feminist movements, which eventually led to the distinction between sex and gender.<sup>52</sup> Some feminists argued that power structures of a socio-political kind often contributed to patriarchal structures in many societies, and that biological essentialism was used to justify these kind of structures. An example of this was the observation of feminists who showed that during the second world war women were permitted to leave the house to engage in stereotypically male occupations such as welding. After the war however, there was a political campaign to get women back to their homes again, when the droves of male war veterans returned home, so that they could get their jobs back.<sup>53</sup> Women were perfectly capable of doing the men's jobs but were held back because of their gender. The postmodern era, signified by deconstruction, tries to take a part and break down not just the concept of gender but also that of sex.<sup>54</sup> Both essentialist and social-constructionist ideas about sex and gender comes into question and are criticized for being under male influenced discourse. Instead of clinging on to all explaining worldviews or metanarratives, identity gets grounded in the individuals self-identifying, and thus identity becomes more fluid.<sup>55</sup> An example of feminist post-modern reasoning about identity is that the essence of authentic sexual identity is a sort of anti-essence, it is defined by what it is not, that such identity is "pockets of resistance" within a patriarchal structure, where the emphasis is on that such identity is not defined by these patriarchal structures.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.2.3 Ancient and modern definitions of sex and gender influence on the Bible**

Thatcher argues that when we read the Bible we anachronistically attach a modern view of the two opposite sexes. Instead, he suggests, the Bible should be read in the light of the one-sex theory.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Pinker 2002, 344–348.

<sup>51</sup> Storkey 2000, 11–14, 19.

<sup>52</sup> Storkey 2000, 25–26.

<sup>53</sup> Storkey 2000, 28–30, 33–35.

<sup>54</sup> Storkey 2000, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Storkey 2000, 44–45

<sup>56</sup> Storkey 2000, 47–48.

<sup>57</sup> Thatcher 2016, 1–6, 84–85.

Thatcher is not primarily concerned on the technicalities of whether they viewed males and females as two sexes or one sex, but the accompanying values of the one-sex theory, holding man superior and woman inferior, which must be dealt with.<sup>58</sup> I agree with this reasoning, but I do not think we should too hastily adopt such a model in view of modern research on biology.

#### **2.2.4 Conclusions**

Defining both sex and gender is not as easy as it first may seem, since these concepts historically have been going through changes. The different definitions about sex and gender seem to weave into one another, something Sabra L. Katz-Wise and Janet S. Hyde acknowledges, describing it as a “interplay” between sex and gender.<sup>59</sup> For this dissertation I will try to bring up the nuances of the definitions, to show that this are complicated terms. However, when using the word “sex” I will generally refer to biological sex, male and female, and when talking about gender I will refer to a social sex. This social sex, depending on where one stand, are influenced to different degrees by the biological sex.

### **2.3 Different interpretations of gender**

#### **2.3.1 A view of gender from social constructionism and Judith Butler**

One interpretation of what gender is, is that its artificially constructed by the social interplay of culture and language. Those who primarily or exclusively believes this to be the foundation of gender will here be referred to as social constructionists. McGeeney and Harvey writes that gender is created through social interaction and shaping of language. Gender according to this view is not rooted in any essential attributes (such as physical genitalia, chromosomes or hormones) but of a person’s behavior, acting or doing gender, thereby creating it. According to McGeeney and Harvey feminist scholars have tried to differentiate between sex and gender, making gender stand for social norms and inequalities, shaped by culture, instead of biological features.<sup>60</sup> This view of gender, as something socially constructed, seems to permeate Western society. In feminist theory Judith Butler has paved the way for social constructionist ideas concerning gender and sex, questioning even the view of the two sexes we have today, regarding them as social constructs.<sup>61</sup> In other words, both sex and gender is socially constructed.<sup>62</sup> Butler does not only argue that gender is socially constructed but that it is created by our actions, something called performativity. The way we behave, act and move

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<sup>58</sup> Thatcher 2016, 57.

<sup>59</sup> Katz–Wise and Hyde 2014, 29.

<sup>60</sup> McGeeney and Harvey 2015, 150.

<sup>61</sup> Butler 1990, 6–7.

<sup>62</sup> Butler 1990, 6–7.

with our bodies create our gender identities.<sup>63</sup> A forerunner of Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, has an influential saying “One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman.” Which has the same reasoning behind it.<sup>64</sup> Tina Beattie argues that gender theorists use an approach which rejects realist claims about the significance of essential sexual characteristics or anatomical differences for understanding sexuality and gender. Beattie shows that this approach uses psychoanalysis, Marxist theory, linguistics, feminism, post-structuralism and post-colonial perspectives and evolutionary, social and behavioral sciences to investigate how gender are influenced by dominant cultural norms.<sup>65</sup>

### **2.3.2 Biological essentialist outlook on Gender**

Biological essentialists offer a different take on what gender is, namely that gender is primarily or exclusively an extension of our biology. There are of course different opinions on how much biology accounts for in our understanding of gender. The term biological essentialism, meaning that biology accounts for most of our understanding, is on one side of the spectrum but I try to show nuances within this category. Biological essentialism argues that the physical differences in hormones, genitalia and chromosome create male and female bodies. This in turn is linked to the identities and behaviors correlated with femininity and masculinity, according to McGeeney and Harvey.<sup>66</sup> Psychiatrist Marcus Heilig confirms and explains these sex differences and shows that at the moment of fertilization, the egg decides whether it should develop a Y-Chromosome, which will lead to the production of the male hormone testosterone, or if it should not do this (which is actually the default mode) where the female hormone estrogen is developed. Estrogen and testosterone have a fundamental impact on the development of gonads (testicles and ovaries) and genitalia/primary sexual characteristics (such as penis and vagina), which are more obvious sex differences. Implied in this development are also some secondary sexual characteristics such as breasts for females that produce breastmilk, which differs from men. But the hormones also affect the nervous system and the brain, meaning that men and womens brain work differently, Heilig shows.<sup>67</sup> The female body develops the ability to give birth to children, which the male body cannot do, he shows.<sup>68</sup>

Often connected to the view of biological essentialism, as McGeeney and Harvey notes, is the evolutionary psychologists who believe gender differences to be a product of the natural selection and social adaptation associated with Darwin’s theory of evolution.<sup>69</sup> An influential thinker focusing on evolutionary psychology is psycholinguist Steven Pinker who argues that evolutionary

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<sup>63</sup> Butler 1990, 25, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Beauvoir 1989, 301.

<sup>65</sup> Beattie 2015, 34.

<sup>66</sup> McGeeney and Harvey 2015, 153.

<sup>67</sup> Heilig 2018, 63–67, 69, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Heilig 2018, 69, 91.

<sup>69</sup> McGeeney and Harvey 2015, 153.

psychology best explains how males and females think and behave.<sup>70</sup> He also acknowledges that there are sex differences rooted in culture.<sup>71</sup> Marcus Heilig shows that men and women are not two different species, but one, but they do have different DNA and due to evolution different reproduction strategies have created differences between men and women.<sup>72</sup> As described above, estrogen and testosterone affects the developments of men's and women's brains, making them work differently. For women the communication between the brain halves are much stronger, but for men the communication within each brain half respectively is much stronger. This results in, on average, better attention, verbal skills and social cognition for women and for men, better connection between sensory information and motoric (movement) skills and the ability to better understand spatial problems.<sup>73</sup> Heilig underlines that these results appear when looking at men and women as groups, since there are always variations within each group, at the individual level it therefore can look very different.<sup>74</sup> He also points out that except for primary sexual characteristics which are binary, other characteristics such as strength shows an overlap for its distribution between men and women, but tilting toward men, and so are non-binary in a sense. Therefore, it is at the endpoints on the spectrum of certain characteristics that we can find major differences, otherwise men and women are quite similar.<sup>75</sup>

## **2.4 Epistemological grounds for gender**

Both biological essentialist and social constructionists seem to have their own different ways of basing their beliefs. They have different epistemologies. As I have discovered biological essentialists lean towards being realists and social constructionists are closer to anti-realist, both valid, but different ways of interpreting reality. What this means will be explained shortly.

### **2.4.1 Biological essentialism and realism**

Biological essentialism is more coherent with the epistemology of realism. Philosopher Ulf Jonsson shows that according to realism there is an objective reality (and truth) out there, which we humans can explore and know. However, Jonsson notes, if our theories about reality are wrong, this is not because of our perception of reality limiting us, as the anti-realist would argue, but that our theories do not properly correlate to our experiences about the objective reality (which can be known).<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pinker 2002, 344–347.

<sup>71</sup> Pinker 2002, 346.

<sup>72</sup> Heilig 2018, 14, 221.

<sup>73</sup> Heilig 2018, 170–178.

<sup>74</sup> Heilig 2018, 178–179.

<sup>75</sup> Heilig 2018, 92–93.

<sup>76</sup> Jonsson 2008, 220–221.

When taken too far, Jonson points out, realism believes the subject and reality to be so different that the subject could not possibly understand or comprehend anything of it.<sup>77</sup>

### 2.4.2 Social constructionism and anti-realism

Jonsson describes anti-realism which argues that there is not an objective world (or objective truth) out there we humans can get a hold of and truly know, because we view and filter things through the lens of experience, culture, language etcetera.<sup>78</sup> Social constructionist talk about gender as something not determined by biology but culture, language and so on, which corresponds to the anti-realist view of epistemology. Taken to its extreme, Jonsson points out, anti-realism assumes the subject to be too colored by its own lenses (experience, culture, language etcetera), making the world only a product of the subjects mind, descending into solipsism.<sup>79</sup> Further Beattie argues that there has been a paradigmatic shift from looking at knowledge from the basis of empirical data and rationalism to using postmodern perspectives, via contextual and narrative approaches. A big emphasis in these is on how language affects and influences both the perception of subject and the view on knowledge itself. This is sometimes referred to as the *linguistic turn* Beattie writes, and the theories used in gender studies is often very much influenced by this shift.<sup>80</sup> Beattie shows that in large the linguistic turn seems to be part of the postmodern reaction to the modern era and its quest to find objective and universal truth. Postmodernist instead try to deconstruct different structures, ideologies and worldviews claiming objective and universal truth, Beattie notes. She explains that this is because postmodernists believe these structures inhibit a power that oppresses and marginalizes other smaller structures, worldviews, ideologies or narratives. Reality, according to above mentioned approaches is then based on language instead of empirical or rationalistic approaches.<sup>81</sup> Beattie writes “Language itself takes the place of a meaningful cosmos, and the silent abyss takes the place of God”<sup>82</sup>

If reality is viewed through this lens, such as in the case for many gender theorists, the subject cannot access and explore reality directly, but indirectly, through the filter of culture and language – which is coherent with the anti-realist epistemology.

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<sup>77</sup> Jonsson 2008, 226.

<sup>78</sup> Jonsson 2008, 219–220.

<sup>79</sup> Jonsson 2008, 226–227.

<sup>80</sup> Beattie 2015, 34.

<sup>81</sup> Beattie 2015, 36.

<sup>82</sup> Beattie 2015, 36.

### **2.4.3 Conclusions regarding differing epistemologies**

Both realism and anti-realism has its dangers, both at their extremes risk disconnecting the subject from reality. Furthermore, anti-realism and realism when related to social constructionism and biological essentialism bring valuable perspectives to the topic of gender. However, the point is to show that there is fundamental disagreement about how reality is constituted. This is important to remember for understanding theologians discussing gender as well, since it will have an influence on theology about gender.

# Chapter 3: World-Openness and Human Embodiment in Thatcher and Storkey

## 3.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the data extracted from the material guided by the perspective and questions worked out in section 1.4. The questions are: How is human embodiment portrayed in relation to gender? How is human world-openness portrayed in relation to gender? How does human embodiment and world-openness correlate in relation to gender? The data from the two authors is represented and summarized in this chapter and is compared in chapter four.

## 3.2 An overview of Thatcher

### 3.2.1 A summary of Thatcher's *Redeeming Gender*

Thatcher's book consists of two parts, one which explores how sex and gender have been viewed through history and the other which takes all this information from part one, to create a theology sensitive to the topic of gender.<sup>83</sup> Thatcher wants to show his readers that viewing male and female as two opposite sexes is a late invention of the eighteenth century and that this view was not in effect during the writing of the New Testament. The dominant view of sex before the eighteenth century proposed by historian and sexologist Thomas Laquer in his book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* which Thatcher presents, was that *man* was the only one sex. Man consisted of two different categories, male and female, existing on the same spectrum. What is maybe more important than male and female not viewed as opposites was the values attached to male and female, where men were viewed as superior and females inferior.<sup>84</sup> According to Thatcher, this view and have influenced the New Testament writers, and of most importance to theology is the (unequal) values it brings to men and women, which have generated a lot of sexism in Christian tradition and theology.<sup>85</sup> These values connected to men and women are still present in the church even if we now consider there to be two opposite sexes.<sup>86</sup> In turn, the view of two opposite sexes (which are also regarded to be heterosexual) was designed to maintain the inferiority of women, oversimplify human sexuality and excludes those of same sex attraction, intersex, transgender and third sex says Thatcher.<sup>87</sup> With this knowledge in mind Thatcher sets out to create a

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<sup>83</sup> Thatcher 2016, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Thatcher 2016, 1–5.

<sup>85</sup> Thatcher 2016, 2, 26–29, 57.

<sup>86</sup> Thatcher 2016, 59–61.

<sup>87</sup> Thatcher 2016, 2–3, 82.



theology of gender in which men and women are fully equal, sharing one and the same nature as humans, created in the image of God, an image which finds its fullness in Christ and is best understood from the non-hierarchical trinitarian relationships of the three particular persons of one essence with perfect reciprocity, communion and love.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.2.2 How is embodiment portrayed in relation to gender?**

Thatcher acknowledges that there are many different aspects of human identity when undertaking the challenge to understand what constitutes gender which relates to embodiment. He even notes that there are probably more factors than the ones he mentions but gives some examples. These examples are different "...material and social categories..."<sup>89</sup> as Thatcher calls them; biological sexual differences, sexual orientation, race, class, age, religion, ethnicity, ability, disability, postcolonial perspectives and cultural affiliations.<sup>90</sup> However, he does come to the conclusion regarding the limited influence of biological factors that "We noted several times that from alleged facts about bodies no prescription can be derived regarding the conduct of relation of gender."<sup>91</sup> Even though Thatcher acknowledges that these factors are contributors to an understanding of what makes up gender, he argues that these should not be the foundation for a Christian understanding of gender. Gender should first and foremost relate to our creation in the image of God which according to Genesis 1:27 male and female are both created in Gods image.<sup>92</sup> Emphasis here lies in the fact that they together constitute the image of God, and both being of the same kind. There is no female kind or male kind, but humankind according to Thatcher.<sup>93</sup> He further points out that the fullness of the image of God lies not with Adam but in Christ (See Col 1:15-20 and 1 Cor 15:45-49).<sup>94</sup> Therefore humanity has its true image in Christ. There is not a male or female essence/nature as basis for gender, for the essence for humanity is Christ.<sup>95</sup> This does not mean that we are not human anymore, but that Christ defines what it means to be fully human. Thatcher also marks that Christ was God, who is beyond the distinction of sex and gender and at the same time he was human, a sexed being. Christ was male but that is of less importance to him being a human and God, just as Christ were other things that is less important than being God and human, such as being a carpenter and Jewish.<sup>96</sup> From this follows that all of humanity, regardless of gender identity is included in the hu-

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<sup>88</sup> Thatcher 2016, 7, 147, 180, 184.

<sup>89</sup> Thatcher 2016, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Thatcher 2016, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Thatcher 2016, 202.

<sup>92</sup> Thatcher 2016, 178.

<sup>93</sup> Thatcher 2016, 176.

<sup>94</sup> Thatcher 2016, 96.

<sup>95</sup> Thatcher 2016, 175, 178.

<sup>96</sup> Thatcher 2016, 157, 179.

manity of Christ, who includes all sexed human beings.<sup>97</sup> Thatcher argues that the image of Christ is reflected in and by Christian communities in four areas – a new kingdom (Col 1:13), a new creation (Col 1:15-17), a new body (Col 1:18) and a new humanity (Col 3:9-15), Thatcher calls this the “fourfold reality”.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, Thatcher emphasizes humanity being created in the image of God, who is triune. His emphasis here is that the trinity is three particular persons but still one essence. This is without hierarchy, domination or subordination where no one is less or more perfect.<sup>99</sup> Thus the trinity provides a foundation for full equality between men and women, with its perfect model of relationality, reciprocity, mutuality, symmetry, love and communion.<sup>100</sup> Thus the foundation of gender lies in us being sexed human beings created in the image of the triune God who is revealed in Christ. However, gender in itself is not an essence but about the relationships between men and women.<sup>101</sup>

### **3.2.3 How is world-openness portrayed in relation to gender?**

A concept that aligns with the idea of world-openness is that of reflexive essentialism presented by Monin Rahman, Assistant Professor of Sociology, and Stevi Jackson, Professor of Women’s studies, which Thatcher takes note of but does not agree with. Reflexive is a category for nouns which refers back to itself, such as oneself, myself, yourself etcetera. Reflexive essentialism thus denotes the person self-identifying as constituting the essence to their identity. They argue that the self-identifying is often centered around sexuality.<sup>102</sup> On another note, Thatcher does agree with the idea that change in the micro-level relationships (ex. The family) will have an impact on macro-level (the state and the relationships between states) relationships when it comes to sex and gender based violence (SGBV), where women most often are the victims. He affirms the standpoint of Valerie Hudson, Professor of Political Science, who argues that action must be taken to change the micro-level relationship for change at the macro-level to guarantee full equality between the genders and prevent SGBV.<sup>103</sup> Examples of action is better education for girls, access to contraception and renaming certain practices, such as renaming child or involuntarily marriage as a crime against humanity. Hudson also suggest the following actions “(1) preventing violence by making violence dysfunctional through creating laws, enforcing them, and modifying the powers of traditions; (2) providing new patterns of thinking and acting that are more likely to keep gender conflicts from arising...and (3) helping all people to internalize gender-equity principles that are the basis of

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<sup>97</sup> Thatcher 2016, 157, 179.

<sup>98</sup> Thatcher 2016, 147.

<sup>99</sup> Thatcher 2016, 180–181, 184.

<sup>100</sup> Thatcher 2016, 162, 184.

<sup>101</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>102</sup> Thatcher 2016, 169–170. Rahman and Jackson 2010, 149.

<sup>103</sup> Thatcher 2016, 197–199.

peaceful interaction with the other sex.”<sup>104</sup> Thatcher thus agrees on that the view on gender can be changed through action, or in other words by an exercise of will rather than being defined by a certain essence or nature. He shows that gender is mainly about the relationships between men and women, therefore not primarily a substance or essence.<sup>105</sup> The way we relate to one another as men and women is what gender is about, which primarily is a way of relating to someone with a different sex. Therefore, gender and the concept of world-openness correlate; even though as Thatcher describes, the way we relate does not mean we decide our gender, since gender is not an essence mainly but a relational concept.<sup>106</sup>

### **3.2.4 How does embodiment and world-openness correlate in relation to gender?**

Thatcher focus is primarily on categories I would label as belonging to human embodiment for understanding gender. These are primarily cultural factors which influence the view on this topic.<sup>107</sup> However, there is a difference between factors that are an influence on our understanding of gender as a secular concept, and factors that create the theological foundation of gender, which is what this thesis sets out to discover. Even though cultural factors affect the way we view gender, Thatcher attempts to find an ontological source for gender in theology, which are quite different things. The theological foundation for gender according to Thatcher is the concept of a trinitarian and Christological based *imago dei* ontology, since it shows how humans exist and relate to God. This should model human relationships.<sup>108</sup> Thatcher shows that gender is not so much of an essence, but a way of relating as sexual human beings, male and female, to one another.<sup>109</sup> Being and relating is therefore inseparable since the God whose image we are created in exists in relationships as the Trinity. World-openness turns out to be a big part of understanding gender but not in the way that we choose our gender. Instead it is about understanding that gender is about choosing the way we act and relate toward the other sex.<sup>110</sup> Thatcher agrees on actions that can be taken to change the view on gender roles, such as education and renaming harmful practices.<sup>111</sup> He also affirms the primacy of being created as humans over male and female, which means all sexed human beings are given value, which would include intersex persons and transgender persons.<sup>112</sup> Thatcher does not deny there being male and female, but he is leaning in that direction. This is evident by the way he tries

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<sup>104</sup> Thatcher 2016, 199. Hudson m.fl. 2012, 180.

<sup>105</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>106</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>107</sup> Thatcher 2016, 23, 202.

<sup>108</sup> Thatcher 2016, 7, 147, 180, 184.

<sup>109</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>110</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>111</sup> Thatcher 2016, 197–199.

<sup>112</sup> Thatcher 2016, 16–17, 148–141.

to show that there are hardly any biological differences between men and women.<sup>113</sup> In conclusion, Thatcher combines elements of human embodiment and world-openness. For the human embodiment he recognizes the many socio-cultural factors influencing our view on gender but that are not foundational for gender. He also affirms that we are embodied as sexual beings primarily created as humans in the image of God. He also recognizes that gender is a way of relating as sexed human beings, but this does not mean that one chooses gender, but instead chooses the way to relate as a human, since we are primarily human.<sup>114</sup>

### **3.3 An overview of Storkey's *Created or Constructed: The Great Gender Debate***

#### **3.3.1 A Summary of Storkey's *Created or Constructed: The Great Gender Debate***

The title reveals one of the major questions brought up in the book; should gender be viewed as given at creation or as something socially constructed? She first looks at three eras which contributed to our understanding of gender today, the pre-modern, modern and post-modern era. This is because there are many people, even the majority, that cling to a modern or pre-modern view of gender according to Storkey.<sup>115</sup> The pre-modern view is signified by the belief that men and women have their respective essences or natures. Sex and gender were not separated and so sex was gender, which Storkey points out as a reductionist biological essentialism. Men and women had their specific gender roles, for example men being rational and strong and women being irrational and nurturing. This was believed to be commonsense and was either justified as a God-given natural order or as rooted in biology.<sup>116</sup> Storkey still argues that there is biological differences between men and women.<sup>117</sup> From the modern era and onward the notion of sex and gender being the same came into question, and with this the idea of a biological nature. More and more the social factors contributing to gender roles were emphasized.<sup>118</sup> Power structures of a socio-political kind often contributed to patriarchal structures in many societies, and feminists were against biological essentialism which was used to justify these kinds of structures.<sup>119</sup> In the postmodern era everything came under deconstruction, this does not just include gender but also sex, which hadn't been questioned in that way before.<sup>120</sup> Both essentialist and constructionist ideas came into question as being

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<sup>113</sup> Thatcher 2016, 174–176.

<sup>114</sup> Thatcher 2016, 6, 168, 176–178.

<sup>115</sup> Storkey 2000, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Storkey 2000, 11–14, 19.

<sup>117</sup> Storkey 2000, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Storkey 2000, 25–26.

<sup>119</sup> Storkey 2000, 28–30, 33–35.

<sup>120</sup> Storkey 2000, 42.

under male influenced discourse. Instead identity was viewed as self-defined and more fluid.<sup>121</sup> Storkey refers to feminist theorists who argue that the essence of authentic sexual identity is a sort of anti-essence, that such identity is “pockets of resistance”<sup>122</sup> within a patriarchal structure. This meant the authenticity of identity was defined in not being shaped by patriarchal structures.<sup>123</sup> With this in mind, Storkey takes a look at contemporary books on gender which are all influenced to different degrees by these three different eras. After this she tries to bridge these secular concepts of gender with theology, which is also influenced by different understandings of sex and gender, often a pre-modern idea of biological essentialism is prevalent.<sup>124</sup> Not unexpectedly, the start of the discussion about gender within the discipline of theology looked at how the whole field was gendered and male dominated. From this Storkey argues that we always need to look at the social context from which theology is made.<sup>125</sup> In the end she proposes that the foundation for sexuality and gender should be based on man and woman being created and together constituting the image of God.<sup>126</sup> This in turn needs to be seen from four perspectives, created with difference, similarity, complementarity and in union.<sup>127</sup> Regarding damaging stereotypical gender roles we need to follow the normative structures which God has created for relationships. These are governed by the characteristics of God; love, justice, righteousness, faithfulness and truth.<sup>128</sup>

### **3.3.2 How is embodiment portrayed in relation to gender?**

Storkey illustrates that there are both biological, cultural factors as well as the significance of experience which have an impact on our understanding of identity in relation to gender.<sup>129</sup> Some examples of cultural factors are ethnicity, region, class and age, while also acknowledging that cultural attitudes about gender can change over time.<sup>130</sup> She favors the cultural elements in the formation of gender.<sup>131</sup> Storkey assumes there to be man and woman but does not discuss the possibility of more than these genders. A theological understanding of sex and gender is grounded in that male and female are created in the image of God.<sup>132</sup> The gender and sex of men and women are confirmed by biology and culture. For example, she shows and seems to agree on a list of male and female characteristics based on studies in sociology, psychology and socio-linguistics, where men and women

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<sup>121</sup> Storkey 2000, 44–45

<sup>122</sup> Storkey 2000, 47–48.

<sup>123</sup> Storkey 2000, 47–48.

<sup>124</sup> Storkey 2000, 75.

<sup>125</sup> Storkey 2000, 75–76, 80–83.

<sup>126</sup> Storkey 2000, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Storkey 2000, 115–117.

<sup>128</sup> Storkey 2000, 114.

<sup>129</sup> Storkey 2000, 110–112.

<sup>130</sup> Storkey 2000, 59.

<sup>131</sup> Storkey 2000, 114.

<sup>132</sup> Storkey 2000, 117.

are shown to be different in many ways<sup>133</sup>. She does not find a basis on an ideal biblical masculinity or femininity, rather ideals for humanity, such as the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).<sup>134</sup> She argues that sex as well as gender are not ontological essences creating human identity, even though sex and gender is part of our humanity.<sup>135</sup> Instead gender and sexuality are components (but not foundational) of men and women's ontological nature as humans, since they are created and share their humanity as Gods image bearers (see Genesis 1:27).<sup>136</sup> Storkey highlights four perspectives of the *imago dei*, men and women's differences, their similarities, their complementarity and their union (being of one nature, human nature).<sup>137</sup>

### **3.3.3 How is world-openness portrayed in relation to gender?**

Storkey argues that it is wrong to think that we, as sexual beings, can pick and choose whatever gender and sexuality we want.<sup>138</sup> If gender is mainly a social construct and we can choose to be however we want, with many masculinities/femininities to pick from, we need to consider what is a good ethical choice.<sup>139</sup> God is equally interested in both gender and sexuality, and the normative structures God has created for relationships should shape our sexuality and gender. Therefore, we can shape our gender, by our own will, as long as it aligns with Gods intent for good relationships, according to Storkey. However, she does this from the framework of there being man and woman, and for her shaping gender means adjusting the gender roles for men and women, not creating new genders. She still promotes an element of choice in the outworking of gender identity. This creative process should be guided by the character of God who is love, justice, faithfulness, truth and righteousness. To fight and address issues of discrimination, power, injustice, unfaithfulness and poor communication.<sup>140</sup> In summary she promotes our ability to choose as an important aspect for the formation for the gender roles for men and women. Choosing in this context primarily means the way we relate to the other sex. She does not discuss the possibility of choosing to be any other genders than these two.

### **3.3.4 How does embodiment and world-openness correlate in relation to gender?**

Storkey suggest an ontological basis for male and female as being humans, created in the image of God. The image of God doctrine should however be viewed from four perspectives, that of similari-

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<sup>133</sup> Storkey 2000, 64.

<sup>134</sup> Storkey 2000, 114–115.

<sup>135</sup> Storkey 2000, 112–113.

<sup>136</sup> Storkey 2000, 117.

<sup>137</sup> Storkey 2000, 115–117.

<sup>138</sup> Storkey 2000, 114.

<sup>139</sup> Storkey 2000, 46.

<sup>140</sup> Storkey 2000, 14–15, 114.

ty, difference, complementarity and union. This is all viewed from the assumption of there being only male and female.<sup>141</sup> Since Storkey does not open up the idea of there being more than two genders, male and female, which is implied by the perspective of difference and complementarity, the door is closed to other possible gender identities. Storkey also brings in the element of choice and action when it comes to changing negative gender stereotypes, which is also within a framework of the male and female gender. She does acknowledge the fact that some are born with ambiguous genitalia but does still view this as them being unclear whether they are male or female.<sup>142</sup> Regarding the effect of choice on the theological basis of gender Storkey does acknowledge the effect of it in changing gender stereotypes. However, the basis still lies in the image of God doctrine which she interprets as containing the male and female gender. But what the female and male gender should look like is another question. Therefore she discusses the problem of several masculinities for example, now as we have become more and more self-identifying.<sup>143</sup> Her solution is to look at the normative structures God has created for relationships, which concerns gender.<sup>144</sup> This God-ethic is based in Gods character, being love, justice, righteousness, faithfulness and truth, as well as the fruits of the spirit.<sup>145</sup> So even though Storkey does not question the gender binary, she attempts to broaden it by letting gendered relationships be characterized by the fruits of the spirit and Gods characteristics. The theological foundation remains the *imago dei*, and males and females being one in essence, that of humanity, which is more connected to the category of human embodiment. World-openness does remain a major factor in the outworking of the gender's male and female. These both have their ideal way of relating toward one another in the way God is and the way he relates, as well as the fruits of the Spirit.<sup>146</sup>

### **3.4 An overview of Storkey's *Evangelical Theology and gender***

#### **3.4.1 A summary of Storkey's *Evangelical Theology and Gender***

In this article Storkey sets out to explain the discussion about gender within evangelical theology. She starts off by saying that gender is primarily a sociological concept, not theological but often the idea of gender in sociology have been imported into theology.<sup>147</sup> However, one of the main problems have been that gender stereotypical roles have long been based on an assumed biological es-

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<sup>141</sup> Storkey 2000, 115–117.

<sup>142</sup> Storkey 2000, 16.

<sup>143</sup> Storkey 2000, 46.

<sup>144</sup> Storkey 2000, 113.

<sup>145</sup> Storkey 2000, 114–115.

<sup>146</sup> Storkey 2000, 114–115.

<sup>147</sup> Storkey 2007, 161.

sentialism, this was until sociologist affirmed that gender was more about social factors.<sup>148</sup> Since gender is shaped within a specific social context, it rejects essentialism.<sup>149</sup> In evangelical circles the discussion of gender has been focused on and polarized between the complementarian versus egalitarian position, which discusses roles without examining the concept of roles, reflecting a modernist essentialism.<sup>150</sup> She argues that there is no specific male or female ingredient for gender in the Bible apart from for example the fruits of the spirit and preferring one another.<sup>151</sup> To understand gender Storkey argues one needs to look at the foundation of what makes up identity, where the importance of the *imago dei* concept comes in. Unfortunately, this has often been viewed as human's intellectual capacity (among other things), often associated with the male whereas the female has been thought as emotional for example, making the male the more perfect image. In this view humans are individual and of opposite natures (male and female).<sup>152</sup> Storkey suggest that instead the *imago dei* needs to be understood from a trinitarian viewpoint, a God who is one being but different persons, thus existing in and because of relationships. Therefore she makes the conclusion that humans are created as relational beings. Ontologically human identity lies in relationship, to each other, to God and the rest of creation.<sup>153</sup> In this vision humans are still personal and sexed bodies even though they share the same nature as humans, which removes the idea of being opposite sexes.<sup>154</sup> She also confirms that God is beyond gender, and even though Christ was male, one should not focus on these particular characteristics (male, Jewish etcetera) but on what he showed about Gods character. That gendered metaphors are used for God is not because God is male or female, but because God is personal, and we do not have no other language to use for persons says Storkey.<sup>155</sup>

### **3.4.2 How is embodiment portrayed in relation to gender?**

Storkey points out that gender is a sociological concept, not a theological concept. Social factors are a big part in understanding gender. She looks at how for many decades gender stereotypes have been supported by false social data, based in an assumed biological essentialism.<sup>156</sup> She shows that gender is formed by contemporary culture where behavior, attitude, conventions and communication patterns are learned. Since the prevailing culture forms gender identity, it rejects any essentialist ideas about the foundation of gender identity, since being for example masculine or feminine is

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<sup>148</sup> Storkey 2007, 161–162.

<sup>149</sup> Storkey 2007, 162.

<sup>150</sup> Storkey 2007, 163.

<sup>151</sup> Storkey 2007, 166.

<sup>152</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–168.

<sup>153</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–169.

<sup>154</sup> Storkey 2007, 170.

<sup>155</sup> Storkey 2007, 172.

<sup>156</sup> Storkey 2007, 161.



different in different cultures.<sup>157</sup> However Storkey does not reject biological factors altogether, we are still sexed bodies.<sup>158</sup>

Storkey makes a distinction about the sociological concept and factors contributing to the formation of gender identity, and a theological basis for gender, even though this does not take away the influences of social factors. There is a difference on the other hand between influences and basis for gender. She argues that the theological foundation for gender lies in our relation to God and emphasizes our creation in the image of God. There have been and are different interpretations of what it means to be created in the image of God. Storkey proposes a more relational understanding of identity, that relationality is fundamental to our identity and to gender. We are created in relation to God, each other and the rest of creation. She points out the dangers of thinking about human beings as individual, separate and with opposite natures, having a male and female nature. In fact, male and female both share and together constitute the same nature as humans, being created in the image of God.<sup>159</sup> Our identity, ontologically, is therefore based on who we are in relationship. Therefore, gender becomes primarily about human relationality. This relational identity of the *imago dei* is built upon an understanding of the triune God who also exists in relationships. This is a God who is three particular persons but one in essence.<sup>160</sup> This means that men and women are not androgynous beings since they share the same relational nature, the differences are still there, remaining personal and sexed bodies.<sup>161</sup>

### **3.4.3 How is world-openness portrayed in relation to gender?**

Often when we think about autonomy, autonomy is linked to the freedom of the individual and independent person, an idea often underlying the understanding of human identity. Storkey criticizes the idea of the individual, cut loose from its context of relationships. She also criticizes the way reason has been portrayed as the key likeness in how we are created in the image of God. Through history, thinking and reasoning have been linked with the male, and emotions and body have been associated with the female, making the male the more perfect image.<sup>162</sup> Instead Storkey shows that we are created in the image of the trinitarian God who exists in relationships, and therefore when God created the human, we were created in relationships. Thus, being and relating is tightly woven together. Because of this, gender is much more about being, living and relating in relationships as a sexed being rather than being a substance or an essence. Therefore, world-openness is expressed by

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<sup>157</sup> Storkey 2007, 162.

<sup>158</sup> Storkey 2007, 170.

<sup>159</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–168.

<sup>160</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–169.

<sup>161</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–169.

<sup>162</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–168.

Storkey in the sense that gender is about relating and acting as a sexed human being, towards other sexed beings, primarily male and female.<sup>163</sup> This does not mean choosing a gender identity but is instead a way of relating, and specifically relating as a sexed human being to others sexed human beings. It also means that we relate to God and the rest of creation, Storkey says, since that is the context in which we are created.<sup>164</sup>

#### **3.4.4 How does embodiment and world-openness correlate in relation to gender?**

Storkey proposes an ontological source for gender in that humans are created in relationship in the image of the triune God, which are three but one in essence and exists in interpersonal relationships. She affirms that we are not created as two different essences or natures but as one, being human. We humans are still different since we are personal and sexed bodies, as male and female. Here we see the element of human embodiment.<sup>165</sup> In the article Storkey criticizes the way we view humans as individual, autonomous and rational beings, disregarding the social context in which we find our identity.<sup>166</sup> The foundational social context, as she shows, is that we are created in the image of the trinitarian God, male and female in relationships. Thus gender gets a world-openness perspective in the sense that gender is about relating as a sexed being towards other sexed beings, as well as to God and the rest of creation.<sup>167</sup> As I understand it, gender is not so much about choosing an identity as it is about relating, even though the way you relate says something about what you are and what you are like.

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<sup>163</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–170.

<sup>164</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–170.

<sup>165</sup> Storkey 20007, 168–170.

<sup>166</sup> Storkey 20007, 167–168.

<sup>167</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–170.

# Chapter 4: Discussion

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the purpose of this thesis, which is to discuss and give suggestions for theological perspectives on gender and to attempt to answer the main question formulation: *What constitutes a theologically informed view on gender?* Both Storkey in her later and earlier work and Thatcher discuss different aspects that influence our view on gender. The authors differ slightly in this area, on which perspectives should be emphasized. However, among both authors is a difference on what perspectives *influence* the view on gender and what elements are *foundational* for a theological view on gender. Therefore, I start by looking at the influencing elements and then the foundational elements. After this, the fused theological understanding about gender from Storkey and Thatcher is discussed from different perspectives.

## 4.2 Perspectives that influence our view on gender

Storkey in her earlier work<sup>168</sup> acknowledges both the cultural (including experience) and biological factors that can have an impact on our understanding of gender, even though she rejects biological essentialism.<sup>169</sup> This is also the case in her more recent work<sup>170</sup> where she questions the value of biological factors. She argues that gender is a sociological concept which is influenced by socio-cultural factors.<sup>171</sup> Thatcher brings up many different elements contributing to our current understanding of gender, biological sexual differences, sexual orientation, race, class, age, religion, ethnicity, ability, disability, postcolonial perspectives and cultural affiliations.<sup>172</sup> It is worth noting that he believes the biological factors to be of limited or no value for understanding gender.<sup>173</sup> He acknowledges for example the difference in brain structure among males and females, as well as hormonal difference, but point out that they are both affected by social experience, to the point where it is hard to know what is rooted in biology and what is culturally influenced.<sup>174</sup> On top of this, Thatcher says that much of our talk about biological elements connected to certain male/female behaviors or characteristics is saturated in gender-schemes that promote traditional gender roles in a tradition of research (scientific, philosophy and theology) that has been historically male dominat-

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<sup>168</sup> *Created or Constructed: The Great Gender Debate*

<sup>169</sup> Storkey 2000, 14–15, 19, 112

<sup>170</sup> *Evangelical Theology and Gender*

<sup>171</sup> Storkey 2007, 161–162.

<sup>172</sup> Thatcher 2016, 23, 167.

<sup>173</sup> Thatcher 2016, 202.

<sup>174</sup> Thatcher 2016, 167–168.

ed.<sup>175</sup> In conclusion both Storkey and Thatcher emphasize the cultural elements for understanding what gender is. Storkey affirms the value of biological factors, even though she leans towards valuing cultural factors more, especially in her later work. Thatcher is at the same time very skeptical of their worth. Both socio-cultural factors as well as biology would fit into the category of human embodiment, which recognizes both biology in that we as humans are created with bodies, and that we are created in a specific social, cultural and historical context, as Daniel Migliore illustrates.<sup>176</sup>

Further, the gender-schemes which Thatcher sees as a possible explanation for the dichotomy between the male/female associated characteristics could be rooted in an anti-realist epistemology, where the validity of empirical psychological and biological data is questioned because of the marginalized non-male experience. This is because he argues that such research has been male dominated historically. This is good to be aware of, since Storkey seems to have a different stance when she makes a list in her earlier work of different characteristics associated with men and women, which is derived from psychology, sociology and socio-linguistics.<sup>177</sup> There is a possibility that this difference lies in different epistemologies concerning how to interpret and obtain knowledge. As Tina Beattie shows, many gender theorists reject realist claims about the importance of sexual characteristics, such as anatomical differences, to contribute to an understanding of gender or sexuality.<sup>178</sup> Thatcher is not a gender theorist, but he seems to use a similar rhetoric when discussing sexual differences and gender. However, in the end neither Thatcher nor Storkey counts cultural or biological factors as a theological foundation for understanding gender. They only view them as elements which influence our view of it even though the influences are used to confirm their theories for theological foundations. These perspectives and epistemologies that we see influence gender come from the secular discourses of gender theory, psychology, biology etcetera, which is reviewed in chapter two.

Regarding biology as Steven Pinker and Marcus Heilig has shown, our biology plays a part in our behavior and thus contributes to the formation of gender.<sup>179</sup> Biology does not account for all of it, which would be a reductionist position, but it does indeed account for some of it. As Storkey notes, gender is a sociological concept, but that does not mean that biological factors don't influence it, as she agrees on in her earlier work.<sup>180</sup> As for Thatcher, who argued that there are gender-schemes influencing the research about biology.<sup>181</sup> There is probably a certain truth to that. This is

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<sup>175</sup> Thatcher 2016, 174–175.

<sup>176</sup> Migliore 2004, 143–144.

<sup>177</sup> Storkey 2000, 64.

<sup>178</sup> Beattie 2015, 34.

<sup>179</sup> Pinker 2002, 344–347. Heilig 2018, 221–224.

<sup>180</sup> Storkey 2007, 161. Storkey 2000, 110–112.

<sup>181</sup> Thatcher 2016, 174.

true especially if we look back in time. As Storkey shows, gender and sex were steered by political ideologies who clearly favored men.<sup>182</sup> This is something to be aware of. But the research from Pinker and especially Heilig is hard to dismiss as simply being under the dominance of male discourse and gender schemes. Heilig himself bases a lot on his arguments on research done by a study in Philadelphia showing differences between male and female brains, led by a female scientist. The results were not at all designed to focus on differences between men and women but were showed simply as the results of tests.<sup>183</sup> The research team even admitted that their results showed that there is a complementarity in the characteristics between men and women, which would strengthen Storkeys point about the sexes being complementary from a biblical perspective.<sup>184</sup>

From this reasoning above we cannot dismiss biological factors, but that does not mean cultural factors don't play a part. For those who fear a biological essentialism, its needs to be said though that biology only shows us how things are in their current state and not how things should be. Heilig underlines this point, called the "naturalistic mistake".<sup>185</sup> Therefore we can acknowledge differences, while still knowing that there are overlaps of characteristics between men and women. It's important to also know that every individual is different and does not necessarily fit into the data derived from the bigger group, as Heilig has shown.<sup>186</sup> On top of this, biology does not have the final word, especially not in a Christian context where biblical revelation show us how things should be.

To conclude this section, I refer to Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen who argues, and I agree, that a middle position between essentialism and constructionism is to be preferred; *critical essentialism*. This he argues, avoids human identity and social roles to be essentialized into two opposites but also affirms the common sense notion that there is a difference between men and women.<sup>187</sup> He refers to Lisa Cahill who explains this as not denying the differences between men and women but acknowledging the social systems which grant men power over women in general. This acknowledges the biological as well as social part of our existence as they are interrelated.<sup>188</sup> As the body of Christ we need to be watchful for and expose negative structures, to remove oppression for women and also for men.

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<sup>182</sup> Storkey 2000, 28–30.

<sup>183</sup> Heilig 2018, 170, 180.

<sup>184</sup> Heilig 2018, 179. Storkey 2000, 115–117.

<sup>185</sup> Heilig 2018, 15–16.

<sup>186</sup> Heilig 2018, 178–179. 222.

<sup>187</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 300–301.

<sup>188</sup> Cahill 1996, 1–2.

### 4.3 Theological foundations for gender

Storkey and Thatcher both agree that gender is less about an essence and more about relationships, the way men and women relate to one another (this will be explored further in section 4.4).<sup>189</sup> Since God is the perfect model for relationships and we are created in his image, the doctrine of *imago dei* becomes a foundation for gender identity.<sup>190</sup> Therefore, it becomes important to understand what God is like and how the persons relates within the Godhead. From this comes the importance of the doctrine of trinity, which reveals Gods relationships within Himself, being three different persons but one in essence. Storkey and Thatcher stress this, and points to the characteristics this reveals about God, such as love, communion and reciprocity.<sup>191</sup> Christ also becomes important. Storkey shows that he reveals the character of God, while Thatcher goes a bit further and emphasizes that Christ is the fullness of the *imago dei*.<sup>192</sup> In the end, both Storkey and Thatcher can agree on that the characteristics of Christ, the way he was and related, also builds upon the understanding of how God is the perfect model for relationships, and thus gender.

An important aspect of the doctrine of the *imago dei*, according to Thatcher and Storkey, is that human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God with one and the same essence (or nature), being human essence, rather than a male and female essence.<sup>193</sup> As Thatcher also points out, this perspective includes those who are outside the binary of male and female, since the most important thing about being created in the image of God is that you are human.<sup>194</sup> Whereas Storkey does affirm the primacy of humanity over male and female, she does not try to blur out male or female or the differences between them. Thatcher does not remove male and female, but it's almost like he does not want to acknowledge their differences. An example of this is the way he relativizes males and females' sexual difference.<sup>195</sup> The topic of differences will be discussed further soon.

To summarize, male and female are created as one being, human, although remaining sexed and personal bodies, in the image of God. God is the role model for gendered relationships, and of which the authors draw upon the way God is and relates, both as the Trinity and as Christ. Therefore, we can see that there is an element of world-openness in Thatchers and Storkeys reasoning. Humans can choose how they relate to one another, and if gender is primarily not an essence but about relationships, the element of choosing how to relate becomes important. However, it is not about choosing gender identity in that sense, it is not an act of self-identifying, but more about

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<sup>189</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–169. Thatcher 2016, 6.

<sup>190</sup> Thatcher 2016, 7, 147, 180, 184. Storkey 2007, 168–172.

<sup>191</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–170. Thatcher 2016, 184.

<sup>192</sup> Storkey 2007, 172.

<sup>193</sup> Storkey 2000, 117. Storkey 2007, 167–168. Thatcher 2016, 178.

<sup>194</sup> Thatcher 2016, 201.

<sup>195</sup> Thatcher 2016, 167–169, 176.

choosing how to relate to someone else, even though that can tell you something about a person. It does not define them. What does define a person is being created as human in the image of God. Storkey emphasizes the differences in being human, male and female, and Thatcher downplays them. The nature of being a sexed human person connects with the human embodiment category, and therefore the theological foundation for gender is a mix of human embodiment and world-openness.

Human embodiment provides the foundation, being a sexed human person, since gender is about how sexed human beings relate to one another. World-openness focus on how they relate, which cannot be separated from being created as a sexed human being in the context of other sexed human beings. In this sense, world-openness and human embodiment are equally important for understanding gender.

#### 4.4 Gender as a way of relating

As stated in the previous section, Storkey and Thatcher both agree on that gender is less about an essence and more about relationships. It is the way we humans relate to one another, and especially between men and women, since it concerns how we as sexed beings relate, which in most cases are either of male or female sex.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, I propose that asking *what* gender is might initially be the wrong question, since it is not a thing but more about a way of being and acting in relationships. Gender thus corresponds to a *how* question. In one sense however, gender can respond to a *what* question if one refers to an ideal way of relating, a relationship ideal, or in other words a gender ideal. This ideal in itself is not based on a *what* question, a substance, for it originates in *someone*. *Who* is it? It is God.

For some, being masculine or feminine in our culture are a gender ideal, for others they are damaging gender stereotypes. As Storkey points out there are many ideals, for example multiple masculinities.<sup>197</sup> But as we have seen, according to Thatcher and Storkey, God has given humanity, not male or female individually, an ideal through *imago Christi* and the Trinity. Storkey affirms this by acknowledging that there are no masculine or feminine ideals for us in the Bible, only a human ideal originated in God. This ideal she proposes draws on the character of God and the fruits of the Spirit (see Gal 5:22-23).<sup>198</sup> Further, if gender is about how male and female relate and act in the context of relationships, it logically follows that gender is the way we live and act in the world as sexed beings, since we live and are created in the context of relationships to humans but also to God

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<sup>196</sup> Storkey 2007, 168–169. Thatcher 2016, 6, 168.

<sup>197</sup> Storkey 2000, 46.

<sup>198</sup> Storkey 2000, 114–115.

and the rest of creation, as Storkey shows.<sup>199</sup> In connection to this, theologian Dale Irvin shows that since we are created in the image of the God of the Trinity, who lives in a communion of love and reciprocity, we too are made to be in communion.<sup>200</sup>

Because of this I argue that being or existing are intrinsically and inextricably connected to relating, which is living and acting in relation to the world around us, which is creation, God and other humans, just as Storkey proposes.<sup>201</sup> Even if a man was left alone as a newborn on a desolate island without other people his entire life, he would still be relating to the creation around him and to God who is ever present. These are the conditions of our existence. Thus, what we call gender identity (whatever it may be, male, female, transgender etcetera) will be connected and influence the way a person relates to the world, how this person lives and acts. Of course, this will not always be the same as two separate people with a male gender, since the social context arguably has affected the way we understand gender and thus will have effects on how we live. Because of the plurality of gender identities today, Storkey suggests that we need to think about what a good or bad choice is ethically.<sup>202</sup> She argues that God has created normative structures for relationships in creation that we need to consider. In other words, gender identity is strongly linked to Christian ethics.<sup>203</sup>

Irvin brings in some important aspects of ethics based on the trinity and Jesus, which is helpful. Irvin argues that one important aspect of salvation is that we become part of the communion of God, but at the same time we also become part of the rest of the heavenly family, which is the church. Trinitarian ethics, characterized by love mutuality, is thus ecclesial ethics, according to Irvin.<sup>204</sup> Adding to this, Irvin points to the way Jesus sought out and ministered to the marginalized and poor, going up against unequal relationships in the current social system. What is more interesting is Irvin's reminder that Jesus's character, life and the Trinity does not result in a model of revolutionary action, overthrowing existing structures but through works of mutuality, reconciliation, love and justice. This is exemplified in Jesus's servant attitude in Mark 10:35-45 according to Irvin.<sup>205</sup> For the topic of gender, this means that our most important task is therefore not to attack and overthrow negative gender stereotypes and relationship structures, but to bring change through love and mutuality. This doesn't mean that critically observing and researching to find the problems in the first place is to be rejected, but the way we as a church act after this step cannot be through

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<sup>199</sup> Storkey 2007, 168.

<sup>200</sup> Irvin 2011, 399–402.

<sup>201</sup> Storkey 2007, 168.

<sup>202</sup> Storkey 2000, 46.

<sup>203</sup> Storkey 2000, 113–114.

<sup>204</sup> Irvin 2011, 399–402.

<sup>205</sup> Irvin 2011, 402–404.



sheer force and power but must be led by the characteristics of Jesus and the Trinity, mutuality and love. One could argue that characteristics such as love, and mutuality is a bit vague to build a relationship ideal on. Won't the way of relating in love look very different depending on what a person regards as loving? That is true, and if it is correct that trinitarian ethics is ecclesial ethics, such dilemmas should be worked out in church at large. Different churches in differing social contexts and situations are faced with various societal feminine/masculine ideals and therefore will take different approaches to living out the rich God-based relationship ideal. This is something we can see in how Paul instructs men's and women's conduct in the churches of the New Testament depending on the church's situation instead of saying general statements about how to be like.

#### **4.5 Human, male and female: difference or similarity?**

Storkey and Thatcher will agree on that there is not a specific gender ideal for men or women, but a common ideal for them as humans. Male and female share the same nature as humans. Even biological research affirms, as Heilig shows, that men and women are not two different or opposite species, but one and the same.<sup>206</sup> But what then does it mean to be a "male" and "female" theologically? If the ideal gender is human and there is no male and female gender ideal, it means that male and female refers primarily to our sexuality, the male and female sex. Even though, as Heilig and Pinker show, gender is informed by biology, but biology does not tell us how to be like, as Heilig mentions.<sup>207</sup>

In discussing gender roles in evangelical theology Theologian Kevin Giles argues that what is different about men and women is their sexuality.<sup>208</sup> Apart from these biological roles which are binary, the roles of men and women actually overlap, being fluid, says Giles.<sup>209</sup> This is also confirmed by the research of Heilig.<sup>210</sup> Theologically he says that "Man is man in distinction to and in relation with woman; woman is woman in distinction to and in relation with man by Gods creative act".<sup>211</sup> He further affirms that there are sexual differences, based on modern research, which shows that for example men are physically stronger and women are better at communicating. However, these differences apply for men and women as groups, for sexual identity does not in general limit what a woman or a man can or can't do, except regarding procreation (e.g. only women can give birth and properly breastfeed). Therefore, Giles means that the Bible and modern research finds common ground in that there are sexual differences between men and women, which have an im-

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<sup>206</sup> Heilig 2018, 221.

<sup>207</sup> Heilig 2018, 15–16.

<sup>208</sup> Giles 2002, 185–186.

<sup>209</sup> Giles 2002, 186.

<sup>210</sup> Heilig 2018, 222.

<sup>211</sup> Giles 2002, 186.

pact on behavior, but this should not be used as rhetoric to limit women or men, since the research looks at men and women as groups, generally speaking, not as individuals.<sup>212</sup> This is an assessment Heilig's research is aligned with.<sup>213</sup>

Furthermore, Storkey points out that there are differences theologically. Eve is not Adam, She, *isha*, is not him, *ish*. They both handle the temptation differently and they are given different curses in Genesis. Through the Bible men and women are depicted differently, and in the NT, for example, Paul promotes certain dress codes for women and he restrains women from exercising some forms of leadership.<sup>214</sup> There are certainly more text one could bring up that could be used to show how to be a man or a woman, like being a man after Gods heart like king David or being courageous like Esther (even though their relationship with the opposite sex was not ideal). All role models except for Jesus (being God) are flawed in providing a gender ideal, even though many of the biblical persons gave examples of good characteristics and action.

For all these texts and more where we can extract male or female characteristics or role models, we need to affirm the texts timeless value, which is something Storkey says in her later work. She says that it is hard to know what texts to include or exclude and what texts are of timeless value and which are historically particular. She also shows that the bias of the interpreter influences the interpretation of the text, which have been the case in the complementarian/egalitarian debate over how to interpret certain Greek words. Finally Storkey notes that we need to remember that if the Bible does not give us specific gender ingredients we should not force these from the text.<sup>215</sup> I agree with this, and believe it is not very helpful to treat the Bible like a manual for masculine/feminine role models, just as it is not helpful to treat the creation story like a modern scientific textbook about the creation of the universe. The truth is that there are not many biblical texts about being male and female which we can be certain have a timeless value, but we can still try to work with the insights we are given.

What I would regard as most helpful for providing a theological understanding of what it means to be male and female would be the creation and fall narrative. However, these do not give any positive instruction about males and females but tell us the challenges and difficulties each sex will face. I acknowledge this without going into describing exactly how this would look like, since that does not fit into the scope of the thesis, even though it is interesting. In comparing Storkey and Thatcher it is still important to note that Storkey acknowledges the differences between male and

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<sup>212</sup> Giles 2002, 187.

<sup>213</sup> Heilig 2018, 178–179, 222.

<sup>214</sup> Storkey 2000, 115. Be advised that I'm working out of an egalitarian position, see section 1.3.

<sup>215</sup> Storkey 2007, 165–166.

female more, whereas Thatcher seems hesitant to it. This is because he emphasizes the primacy of being human much more, even over sexual differences.<sup>216</sup>

Storkey also affirms the complementarity of males and females, and by this she means that they fit and fulfil something in the other, like that Adam was not complemented by any of the animals, only Eve. Another example of this is when Paul talks about how men complement women and vice versa (see for example 1 Cor 11:11). Storkey notes that this does not imply hierarchy but points to the complementary nature of male to female and female to male.<sup>217</sup> Even though it is hard to affirm timeless values, the complementary nature of males and females portrayed in the creation and fall story is of more value as Storkey has shown. On top of this, texts about marriage are also significant, which is constituted between a male and female, where they become one flesh (Gen 2:24, Matt 19:4-5) which Storkey affirms as well as Giles who argues that marriage is the most intimate of life unions.<sup>218</sup> These passages I argue give us foundational elements to recognizing the difference and complementarity of males and females, even though the differences shown concern the challenges males and females face (e.g. the curses). We also need to recognize there is not a complete picture to be found in the Bible, we are only given clues.

What about biological difference and anomalies, and conditions such as intersex? Even though it would have been very interesting to discuss these topics here, I do not have the space to do so, and it is outside of the scope of the thesis. Nevertheless, I want to affirm that all humans are created in the image of God, as Storkey and Thatcher show, and so is the intersex person, since that person is human.<sup>219</sup> This also applies for someone who is transgender, which is also a topic I touch on partly but can't delve deeper into. Jesus and the trinity should be guiding us for our gendered relationships. It leads however to questions about what is fundamental to our identity. This will be discussed soon, in relation to gender.

## 4.6 Gender monism and dualism

Storkey argues that seeing gender as either monistic or dualistic will cause problems. If human identity is only seen as one nature without difference, a false androgynous vision of human identity is created. Instead Storkey affirms that we are sexed and personal bodies.<sup>220</sup> A dualistic view of

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<sup>216</sup> Thatcher 2016, 138–141.

<sup>217</sup> Storkey 2000, 116–117.

<sup>218</sup> Giles 2002, 210.

<sup>219</sup> Storkey 2000, 117. Storkey 2007, 167–168. Thatcher 2016, 178.

<sup>220</sup> Storkey 2007, 170.

humanity has historically favored males, giving him a higher status than the female. This neglects the similarity of male and female, Storkey points out.<sup>221</sup>

The best option is therefore to maintain the similarity and differences between males and females created in the image of God as humans. I would argue the monist/dualist thinking influences the way gender is understood in secular thinking too. If gender is seen as dualist, it reduces gender to a biological essentialism producing the gender stereotypes of males and females, where the cultural elements are not recognized. If gender is seen through a monist perspective, there is no difference between biological males and females. As Heilig and Pinker show, males and females are different sexually, which also creates (seen on a group level) differences in behavior and thinking.<sup>222</sup> Theologically we cannot reject our embodiment biologically as males and females, which is not confirmed only by Genesis 1:28 but by contemporary research. If we do not acknowledge the differences on gender originated in biology we risk slipping into a gnostic view of human identity, where our sexual differences only seem to be accidental, as if God by accident created male and female when God really wanted just to create one androgynous being. We need to recognize the way women and men differ, and this applies not just to sex but the effects on gender as well, although we can only talk about this in general terms. This does not mean we return to a biological essentialism, but that we can still learn something from biology. We need to recognize both biological and cultural elements, which would be the middle position of critical essentialism previously mentioned by Kärkkäinen.<sup>223</sup>

After this we need to view them in light of the *imago Christi* and the Trinity to find good ways of relating to one another which we have seen illustrated by Storkey and Thatcher. Therefore, good gender ideals can be formed for men and women as groups taking into account the biological presuppositions men and women generally have, and therefore will probably look slightly different. Notice I use the word *good* gender ideals, which means they are not flawless but still helpful, the *ideal* or *perfect* gender ideal remains rooted in the model of Christ and the Trinity, which all gender ideals should conform to. Being a woman or a man in a specific culture also comes with challenges in how to be a man/woman since the culture promotes a certain way or ways to be a masculine/feminine. If these are not in line with the character of God it proposes a challenge to the Christian ideal. However, there is also good characteristics derived from biology and culture related to how men and women are which does align with the God-model which needs to be affirmed. In this we need to remember that God created the whole human being, declaring it to be *good* (Gen 1:31).

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<sup>221</sup> Storkey 2007, 167–170.

<sup>222</sup> Heilig 2018, 91, 178–179, 224. Pinker 2002, 340–347.

<sup>223</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 300–301.

The cultural gender ideals, again, need to be measured by the *imago Christi* as the perfect ideal for relating, since he showed how humans should relate, not just men or women.

On another note, we also need to recognize that when it regards our identity, we all are more than just our sex and our gender. We are fathers, daughters, right-wing, neighbors, friends, immigrants, football players, firefighters, store clerks, Mac-users, vegetarians and so on. Is there something that is more fundamental to our identity? Stanley Grenz reasons that we can only find our meaning and identity in relation to God.<sup>224</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen adds to this reasoning by showing that modernity and postmodernity stopped basing identity on any metaphysical beliefs (as in God). This has led to the individual's self-identified, self-constructed, fleeting and ever-changing identity of today.<sup>225</sup> He also argues that the most central thing about our identity is that we are in relation to God.<sup>226</sup> With this, we can draw the conclusion that gender identity is one of the many things a person is but is not the most central thing. Their relation to God is. This is explored further in the next section.

#### **4.7 Gender and the plurality of *imago dei* doctrines**

Thatcher and especially Storkey rely on a relational view of the *imago dei*, which is foundational for their understanding of gender. Since there are other views on the *imago dei* though, how do we reconcile them and what is the influence on the theological understanding of gender? Kärkkäinen shows three major views on *imago dei* through church history. First the structural view. This is the belief of something within the structure of humans making us the image of God; such as reason or will. Later reflections on this by the patristic fathers however recognized the whole body, not just the brain, as part of the image, since God's eschatological vision includes bodies. During the reformation came the relational view, which Thatcher and Storkey use. It emphasizes that we are first and foremost created in relation to God, others and the rest of creation. Relationships are thus in focus. In modernity the dynamic view came into being, influenced by the evolutionary theory and the other views on *imago dei*, where the *imago dei* is seen as a divinely set destiny and direction towards communion with God and at the same time a present reality opened up by Christ who brought the fullness of the image to humankind.<sup>227</sup> Kärkkäinen affirms that one should not single out one view and exclude the others, but view them as complementary. An example of this is both reason and will. These are components of the image which Storkey rightly criticizes in having pri-

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<sup>224</sup> Grenz 2000, 132.

<sup>225</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 271–273.

<sup>226</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 275.

<sup>227</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 274–278.

marily been connected to males and are still necessary for giving humans the freedom to choose which is integral to love and how we relate to others.<sup>228</sup>

At the same time as Kärkkäinen acknowledge the complementarity of the views he underlines that the most central part of being in the image of God, is that humans are in relation to God. According to Kärkkäinen this is the only way all humans, regardless of any other factors, such as rationality and relationality, share in the image of God. Even relationality, he says, is about God relating to the human. God, a being who we can never fully know, understand or comprehend, remains a mystery. Kärkkäinen then concludes that human personhood will always remain a mystery, since humans are created in Gods image.<sup>229</sup> If we then consider that Jesus reveals God, we find that there is a tension between what has been revealed through Jesus, and at the same time what can never be fully know about the depths of God. This means from a theological standpoint that we can know how to be like and relate to one another, but never completely, just as we never completely can know God and in turn ourselves.

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<sup>228</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 275. Storkey 2007, 167.

<sup>229</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 275, 280.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and bridge to the contemporary debate about gender

As we seen gender is not primarily a substance but a way of relating for sexed beings. Therefore, gender can be described as ethics for sexed human beings primarily between other sexed human beings. We are created as humans primarily in the image of God within the context of relationships, as the Trinity is in relationships. We relate to the people around us in addition to God and the rest of creation. Being and relating thus is tightly interconnected. The categories of human embodiment and world-openness borrowed from Daniel Migliore correlate in this view.<sup>230</sup> For our gendered relationships we have the Trinity and Christ as models, the later one especially since we as Christians find the fullness of the image in Christ. However, we are not created as androgynous beings, but as male and female, which have differences which both biology and the scriptures affirm. This is although secondary to our creation as humans, which gives dignity to all people, such as those of intersex. It must be emphasized however that we are not just one thing, such as our gender. We are many things. Separating the different parts of our identity becomes very reductionist and separating our embodiment as sexual beings from the rest of us becomes gnostic. In the end though, the primary and most foundational thing about our identity is that we are in relation to God, which all people are, since this does not depend on our ability, gender, sex or anything else, but in Gods ability to relate to us.

As for being masculine and feminine, there is not a specific biblical gender ideal for each of them respectively, except for Jesus and the Trinity. We have also recognized that contemporary research shows that biology does in fact have an impact on gender, making biological males and females different. The Bible also recognizes differences between men and women regarding the preconditions, even though the gender ideal in God remains the same. Therefore, we can form *good*, although not *ideal*, gender ideals for men and women respectively, considering these preconditions. It is as if men and women travel towards the same end goal but have different starting points. They face diverse obstacles along the way, thus benefiting from instructions taking those starting points into account.

Further, biology does not just show us differences but that the characteristics which is biologically influenced overlaps between the genders. It is at the ends of the spectrum that we see clear variances. Culture also has an impact on gender, and it looks different in different cultures. Therefore, I suggest not putting men and women into stereotypical boxes but to broaden the meaning of

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<sup>230</sup> Migliore 2004, 143–145.

what it means to be man and woman. This can help biological men and women not fitting into the masculine/feminine stereotypes to still feel like a man or woman without feeling the need to change their gender identity. Here we need to adapt a critical essentialism, shown by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, which acknowledge our differences but also look out for the negative cultural and social power relations which oppresses most often women (which is very clear historically) but also men.<sup>231</sup> We need to be aware of the old value cultural systems that have negatively influenced women as Thatcher points out.<sup>232</sup> Both cultural and biological elements influencing the way we view gender must be viewed through the lens of the characteristics of Jesus and the Trinity for forming good gendered relationships. Both culture and biology tell us how things are. They do not tell us how things should be and that is why we must turn to the model above. On top of this, what being masculine or feminine means varies depending on the cultural context, even though the biological influences remain very similar. Practically we must therefore put biology and culture under inspection, to see what aligns with the characteristics of God and what does not. This means that we can find both positive and negative attributes derived from biology and culture in regard to men and women that does or does not align with the God-model. Further we need to observe, research and discuss which should turn into action to either speak up against cultural or biological gender stereotypes and stereotypical gendered action, or to affirm their goodness. The church needs to do this with the servant attitude of Jesus in Mark 10:35-45 and informed by the love and mutuality of the Trinity.

As a final note would like to suggest different areas for future research. Exploring what universal truths there really are about men and women in the Bible would help establish men and women's general disposition and thus help foster better discipleship for men and women with Christ and Trinity as the shared model. In this we need to remember that there is a difference in how men and women generally are like and how they *should* be like according to the God-model. It would also be beneficial to do a cultural analysis of what men and women are expected to be like and what they are like in specific cultural contexts. This would help the churches in that context to see what part of the God-model that needs to be emphasized (e.g. hospitality in an individualistic culture). To investigate the eschatological aspect of gender would also add something to the conversation and would generate several questions; are we male and female in the eschatological future? Do we have bodies? How is Christ shown to be like as he visits his disciples after his resurrection? The topic of gender is also made more complex by the topics of intersex and transgender (including

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<sup>231</sup> Kärkkäinen 2015, 298–301.

<sup>232</sup> Thatcher 2016, 1–5, 57.



gender dysphoria), two areas which are both relevant and would be worth exploring further, not to mention the pastoral approach to these topics.

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