

THE SACREDNESS OF THE TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCE

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I have a niece who is deutan colorblind, meaning she has trouble distinguishing between red and green. Even when she and I are looking at the same things, we see them quite differently because of our bodies—specifically our eyes. I don't see her difference as a deficiency, and in fact, I am fascinated by hearing how she experiences the world. She has a unique perspective, and while I will never experience it, I try to understand it. At family gatherings, I ask her what everyday objects look like to her, and I have explored online simulators to imagine the world as she sees it. Transgender people, too, experience the world in distinct ways that offer valuable perspectives on life. As a transgender Mormon theologian, I feel I am in a position to articulate the value and insight that transgender people offer the human family. While most of you listening will likely never experience being transgender, I pray that you will be curious about our differences and strive to learn from them.

Eternal Progression and the Fluidity of Gender

The doctrine of eternal progressions means that we will constantly grow and change forever. Yet some paradoxically claim that certain aspects of existence are immune to change and therefore beyond progression. One

of the common things that people latch onto is gender. As I examined at the first Reform Mormon General Conference, even our understanding of God has not been eternal and unchanging, so why would something like gender be immune from change? Within this life, some certainly have an unchanging sense of their gender identity. However, there are others whose eternal progression includes learning what their true gender identity is. I am one of these people. I have been told since birth that I was to be a man because of how my body looked. However, this ended up not being applicable to me because as I progressed, through studying and pondering, I found that I am, in fact, a woman. Part of this pondering was allowing myself to express masculinity alongside femininity and seeing how each felt. I came to find that I looked forward to the days when I would be expressing myself more femininely, and my masculine days increasingly made me feel uncomfortable. My enjoyment of femininity is called gender euphoria, and my aversion to masculinity is referred to as gender dysphoria. This phenomenon has been explored within our tradition: the book *Queer Mormon Theology* by Blaire Ostler suggests that the Spirit communicates through the body and uses feelings to confirm truths. In this way, gender dysphoria and euphoria could be seen as the Holy Ghost prompting people to recognize their identity.

In 2nd Nephi, Lehi blesses Jacob and teaches him about the Law of Opposition, where he pairs opposite or contrasting concepts to explain how one implies the other, thus creating a binary. However, Old Testament scholars have identified how a seeming binary may actually be a spectrum, a concept called Merism. Merism is a literary device in which two polar or extreme terms (like “heaven and earth”) are paired to represent the entire range or totality between them, rather than just the endpoints. Merism is famously illustrated in the creation story: On the first day of creation the binaries of day and night were created, yet dawn and dusk also came into existence. On the third day, land and sea

were separated, yet marshes and beaches blur these distinctions. Likewise, on the sixth day of creation, the gender binary was established, and yet, like the other acts of creation, there are people who are not part of those initial binaries. None of these are mistakes or exceptions; they are integral to the beauty of the earth. Each one may be understood to be a certain way at a particular time, but none are rigid, and all are fluid and able to change, for the very nature of reality is progression.

What Perspectives We Bring

Transgender and nonbinary people walk a sacred and holy path. Our lives offer unique insights into divinity and humanity, revealing facets of the human experience that many cisgender individuals may never encounter or even consider. For example, most people live their entire lives predominantly experiencing the effects of either estrogen or testosterone, unaware of how these hormones shape not only their bodies but also their minds and emotions. Transgender individuals who undergo hormone replacement therapy, however, often undergo significant physiological and emotional changes as they live with the effects of both hormones at different life stages. In my personal experience, when my body predominantly had testosterone, I struggled to cry. I would feel emotions deeply, but my body resisted the act of crying, leaving me frustrated and unable to access the relief that tears can bring. Many assumed my difficulty crying was due to social conditioning—that I had been taught to suppress my tears to appear “manly.” But that wasn’t entirely the case, because the physical influence of testosterone in my body played a big part in this. I recall a day several months after I began hormone replacement therapy when I had a tough day at work. I sought comfort from my wife, cried, and in a matter of minutes, I felt better and I remarked to her how much crying helped relieve my emotional state. This experience taught me something profound: Our emotions and their physical manifestations

are influenced by our biology in ways we don't always recognize. For me, having experienced both of these hormones, I am able to provide a valuable insight into the effects of these to my cisgender family and friends. For the men in my life, I can empathize more deeply with their experiences, because I once felt similarly constrained by testosterone's effects. Likewise, I can help cisgender women better understand some of the emotional barriers that men may face, fostering more compassionate and meaningful conversations. This dual perspective of having experienced life through the lens of both hormones has deepened my understanding of the human condition. It's one of many ways that transgender people enrich humanity—we offer insights into the complexities of body, mind, and spirit.

Conclusion

The prophet Moroni counseled us to “take heed . . . that ye do not judge that which . . . is good and of God to be of the devil” (RefMo Moroni 7:5; RLDS 7:12; LDS 7:14). Too often, difference is met with fear rather than curiosity. Fear of what is unfamiliar can lead to isolation, misunderstanding, and even violence. In the same chapter, Moroni taught us a good rule of thumb to know good from evil: “That which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God” (RefMo Moroni 7:4; RLDS 7:11; LDS 7:13). When I speak with my niece about her colorblindness, I don't approach her experience as something broken or lesser; I approach it with curiosity, seeking to understand an experience that is different from mine. I may never see the world as she does, but by listening to her, I gain new insights as to what it means to be human. Her colorblindness is neither a flaw nor a mistake—it simply offers a way of experiencing the world that reflects the variety and goodness of God's creation. In the same way, transgender and nonbinary people

experience the world through a lens that cisgender people do not. Our differences are not deficiencies; they are invitations and opportunities for you to see the richness and complexity of human existence in ways you may never have even considered. When you take the time to listen to our experiences, you are not just showing us kindness; you are gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Our trans-ness is good and godly.

In light of this, I would like to make a proclamation, and I encourage you to contact me at ReformMormon@gmail.com so you can sign your own name to this proclamation:

We believe that gender, like all aspects of our eternal journey of progression, may also be a process of self-discovery. While some experience an unchanging sense of identity, others come to understand their true gender over time. We believe that just as dawn and dusk exist between day and night, and marshes and beaches blur the boundaries of land and sea, so too does gender exist beyond a rigid binary. These variations are not mistakes or exceptions but integral to the divine order, for all things are in motion, reflecting the eternal principle of progression. We believe that experiences of gender euphoria and gender dysphoria are forms of divine revelation, prompting individuals to recognize their gender identity. As we listen to these promptings, we come to understand more fully who we are meant to become. We believe that those who transition genders gain unique perspectives. Their insights foster empathy, bridge divides between genders, and enrich conversations about the complexity of the human experience. We believe that transgender and nonbinary individuals should be welcomed, respected, and affirmed in all spaces—public and private—without fear of exclusion, discrimination, or violence. As the Prophet Moroni taught, all that invites love and goodness is divinely inspired. We reject fear-based judgment and seek to build a world where all people are seen, valued, and celebrated.

Now that this proclamation is made, I ask you: Will you choose curiosity over fear? Will you, like I do with my niece, seek to understand

perspectives different from your own? Will you join me in building communities where all—cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary alike—are seen, valued, and embraced as part of God’s divine creation? This sacred work has already begun. The path has been laid before us. I invite you to walk it with me—with open hearts, open minds, and an unwavering commitment to love, affirmation, and grace.

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