

Shanon Ferguson, Senior Pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of North London, is sponsored by the Foundation to carry out her doctoral studies in 'Transgression, Transfiguration, Transcendence: investigating gender binaries from the perspective of Christian spirituality and the Bible.' The research involves not only questioning and offering alternatives to the commonly held view that gender is, and only can be, understood as male or female, but also looks at the impact this has on both the individual and the church and their relationship with each other and a Trinitarian God.

There has been very little research conducted in the area of non-binary gender, especially from a faith perspective. Helen Savage states that '[T]here is a real need for a theology that is prepared to engage with pluralism and complexity, and not one that is simply too scared to offend those whose beliefs that sex, gender and sexuality are simple matters and who thereby seek to bless inappropriate and often damaging social models.'ⁱ Because of this scarcity, this research looks at literature from transgender and intersex studies as well as more general gender studies employing a multi-disciplinary approach.

After briefly looking at the various influences and changes that have led to the current understanding of gender this research hopes to take things further by exploring the following questions:

1. Is a gender binary truly divinely ordained?
2. What impact would a non-binary understanding of gender have on church organisations and consequently how we 'do' church?
3. What impact does holding on to binary gender have on those who do not understand their gender in this way? Are they also 'made in the image of God'ⁱⁱ?
4. How does a non-binary understanding of gender affect a person's relationship with a Trinitarian God?

This cutting edge research has a particular significance at a time when churches are struggling with questions of sexuality, same-sex marriage, women priests and declining membership/attendance.

ⁱ Savage, H., *Changing Sex?: transsexuality and Christian theology*, Durham E-Theses (2006)

ⁱⁱ Genesis 1:27