

Inaugurated eschatology from a transgender perspective


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Many people who identify as transgender, experience discrimination, stigma and societal marginalisation as if they are not really human beings created in the image of God. This article argues for more acceptance of transgender people within a Christian world view. I contend that gender and the *imago Dei* can make room for more inclusivity and inherent human dignity for all people. Transgender identity, the idea of inaugurated eschatology as 'already/not yet' with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the restoration of God's image, and the acceptance of transgender individuals in God's Kingdom will be focussed on. Inaugurated eschatology enlightens us on who we are in Christ. The topic focusses on transgender issues in relation to inaugurated eschatology and its effects on transgender roles within the Christian faith community. The nature of the research is qualitative and descriptive, either contradicting or supporting different views on transgender and inaugurated eschatology.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: To encourage discussion and deeper exploration of the concepts of transgenderism and inaugurated eschatology that could contribute to more inclusivity and inherent human dignity for all people in the fields of theology, gender studies, politics, philosophy, history and psychology.

Keywords: inaugurated eschatology; transgender; gender; image of God; Holy Spirit; inclusion.

Introduction

Eschatology is a biblical concept as it permeates the entire message of the Bible. It is a Christological category concerned with the return of Jesus Christ and is closely connected with the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit as the gift and agent of inaugurated eschatology, previous expectations and the promise for the future that is yet to come are fulfilled. The Holy Spirit aids, among other things, our moral beliefs, social transformation, misplaced desires and also our views about inequality.

Transgender people suffer under stigmatisation, prejudice and social exclusion as if they are excluded from being human or created in the image of God. This article therefore makes a case for greater inclusivity for transgender people within Christian thinking. With inclusivity, I propose that gender and the *imago Dei* should symbolise inclusion and fundamental human dignity to all human beings. I therefore argue that the power of the Holy Spirit, as the fulfilment of the eschatological promise, is working through all the followers of God.

The article focusses on transgender identity, the concept of inaugurated eschatology as the 'already/not yet' with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the restoration of God's image and the inclusion of transgender people in the Kingdom of God. The nature of the research is qualitative and descriptive, either contradicting or supporting different views on transgender and inaugurated eschatology. The aim of this essay is to discuss how inaugurated eschatology helps us understand who we are in Jesus Christ. The discussion focusses on 'transgender' through the prism of inaugurated eschatology and its implications for transgender roles in the Christian faith community.

Although the term 'transgender' has a complicated and controversial definition, it will be used in this article as a term for people whose gender identity is different from their gender that they were given at birth.

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(Trans)gender identity

In many discussions, the issue of gender takes centre stage. This is not limited to theological considerations but also finds its way into other disciplines such as politics, philosophy, history and psychology. Although deliberations on the gender concept are embraced in settings such as the Church, society and culture, the question about transgender and sexuality has caused much division among different Christian traditions (Huttunen 2016:14).

However, the many forms and definitions for the term 'gender' still make it an ambiguous term in many disciplines. 'Gender' is commonly understood as something for women by women or merely being male or female, and conversations about sex and gender are about the physical body as being male or female (sex) and how one lives in one's physical body (gender) (Wood 2019:3). Although the concepts 'gender' and 'sex' are often used interchangeably, these are two separate terms. 'Gender' is a social construct that includes characteristics, norms, relationships and behaviours of men and boys, as well as women and girls in society (WHO 2023).

Being connected to one's body, identity, culture and social constructs, gender relates to one's choice to identify as a man or a woman. Gender can therefore change – it is personal and complex. Sex, as a person's bodily traits as male, female and intersex, is based on 'chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics' (Healthline 2022). The term 'transgender' in this article is used to refer to non-conforming views of gender, specifically those who do not identify with the sex that they were born with.

Included in the gender debate is the issue on transgender and intersex genders, where we often find ourselves at a loss of words or ill-prepared when the topic arises. For this reason, it is important to clarify the terms 'gender', 'transgender' and 'intersex'. 'Transgender' is the umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual and allies. Definitions vary from the gender identity of someone who does not identify with an assigned sex at birth, a gender outside the man or woman binary and someone who does not identify with any gender or one who identifies with multiple genders (LGBT Resource Centre 2023). Although the term represents a specific group of people, it includes gender fluidity and sexual identities (Wamsley 2021). Intersex individuals do not fit into a particular male or female gender norm, and the term is used by those whose reproductive anatomy is not biologically typical (Wamsley 2021).

Transgender people assert that their bodies and minds are separate, and that their self-awareness determines who they are. For them, their outward appearance – which depicts how others observe them – represents a false self. Garcia (2018:3) says that for some transgender people, their self-concepts come first and their physical minds are distinct from their physical bodies. People often reject transgender

people, even within their own family, Church and social circles (Garcia 2018:5–7). Cornwall (2022:358) states that there are transgender interpreters who hold the view that gender is uncertain or irrelevant. However, gender must have some significance argues Cornwall because so many individuals, including transgender people, regard it as a critical component of their sense of identity. If gender were ultimately to have no meaning, human life might not resemble much of anything in both the eschaton and life as we currently know it (Cornwall 2022:358).

Biblical texts, especially those that are referred to as 'clobber verses'¹ are read, quoted and interpreted to silence transgender individuals, which often resulted in hate and violence against transgender people. Ironically, these texts are used to both celebrate and condemn the transgender concept (Garcia 2018:1). Michels (2015:1) claims that if the queer-bashing tradition is a living tradition, especially among significant influencers within and outside the Church, prophetic voices and communities, then God will call his people to repent. They will be called to repent for the violence of marginalisation and worse, for the actions that they carry out, consciously or not, in God's Name, against non-heterosexual people. Biblical texts are therefore used for or against transgender people. However, these texts do not represent a checklist for stereotyping transgender people.

How do we respond to transgender people confronted with a body they were born with and who experience and perceive a sense of estrangement from their biological sex? Who we are in the present does not define who we will become, but what we are becoming in Christ. As a result of Christ's resurrection and the promise that he will return, we find out who we are in Christ (Makant 2016:410).

It is therefore essential to understand how inaugurated eschatology influences what it means to be transgender in Christ, what it means for the future of transgender existence and what it means for the theological topic of inaugurated eschatology.

Inaugurated eschatology

Eschatology is an intrinsic and a deep-seated part of revelation infused in the entire Bible. Texts about the end-time in the Old Testament refer to the 'Latter Days' prophesies. According to Beale (2016:5), these prophesies point to a time when the Messiah will defeat Israel's 'enemies when some gentiles will submit to God', a time in the future 'of God's reign on earth', Israel's redemption and 'restoration from exile', the crumbling of the empire, the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, the great tribulation, Israel's deliverance, the resurrection and a new creation.² The term

1.Examples are Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10, Romans 1:26–27 and Genesis 19:1–29.

2.Old Testament: Genesis 49:1: Jacob's prophecy concerning the futures; Numbers 24:14: Balaam's prophecy; Isaiah 2:2: Some gentiles submit to God; Ezekiel 38:16: Israel oppressed; Hosea 3:4–5: Return from exile; Daniel 2:28: Empires crumble and divine kingdom set up; Daniel 10:14: Coming of the antichrist and persecution; Daniel 12:2: Resurrection.

'Latter Days' in the New Testament³ refers exclusively to the future regarding the coming of the Messiah. God's reign began with the Davidic king, Israel's enemies were defeated, and it marks the beginning of the tribulation, false teachings and persecution of God's people. Israel's restoration has already begun, Jesus was resurrected, and the outpouring of the Spirit and the resurrection took place (Beale 2016:8).

Generally, eschatology studies discuss matters of 'death, the intermediate state, the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection, the last judgement' and the new Heaven and Earth. Having a teleological dimension, eschatology deals with hope, death, the future, and the belief that there is a life after death. Human beings therefore have a 'beyond' after death. Death is not the end of life or a final destination (Mayemba 2009:1). It is rather the coming of the inaugural eschatological Spirit, who is more than the charismata, who brings gifts of change and renewal for an eschatological reality that forms part of the view of the eschatological community and the Church.

Eschatological energy permeates every central tenet of the Christian religion. Beale uses green tinted sunglasses to explain that everything the disciples saw, had an end-time tint, much as everything seems green when you put on green tinted sunglasses. Christ had given his disciples eschatological glasses *via* the power of the Holy Spirit (Beale 2016:4).

According to Voelkel (2020:215), eschatology is a reflective thinking on our Christian faith and that would be at risk if we fail to realise the opportunities which our hope offers us. It has a profound impact on both the individual and the community as it is concerned with God's anticipated reign over all creation and the fulfilment of human existence. Eschatology is not only about death or the hereafter, but also about a common, fundamental hope for the world as it is right now. The fact that Jesus' work will only be consummated upon his Second Coming is significant for the idea of an inaugurated eschatological (Dunn 2021:18; Gladd & Harmon 2016:xi). God's Kingdom was formed when he manifested as Jesus Christ ('incarnation) to make peace between God and humans (cross)' (Dunn 2021:86; Gushee & Stassen 2016:96). The resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Church acted as ultimate signs of the eschaton. Jesus' resurrection is not only a token of God's favour towards his son, but it also marks the beginning of the end times and their entry into human history (Beale 2016:17).

Inaugurated eschatology should also direct our understanding of who transgender people are in Christ. Transgender people are leaning toward alternative eschatologies, such as queer eschatology, gay eschatology and transgender eschatology because, according to Carroll (2021:1), '[w]e inhabit the world in a fundamentally different way, and thus experience God in a fundamentally different way – in many ways, a richer way than normative Christians'.

3.Outside of Paul's corpus are texts such as 2 Peter 3:2–3; John 6:39–40, 44, 54; John 11:24; John 12:48 and 1 Peter 1:5, 20. In Paul's letters, the term 'latter days' is used in 1 Corinthians 10:11; Galatians 4:4–7; Ephesians 1:9–10, 20 and 1 Timothy 4:1.

According to Yasuda (2022:72), who writes from a queer eschatological perspective, Christian eschatologies failed to take smaller ends⁴ into account, arguing that there are endless eschatological possibilities to deal with the end, such as the end of civilisation, nations, cultures, communities and people because of war, political and economic corruption and catastrophic natural events. She claims that transgender people criticise the Christian eschatology and advocate for an alternative eschatology (Yasuda 2022:73). The sense of injustice of a heteronormative future orientation brings about ends and deaths. However, queer temporalities reject this concept of time and instead suggest alternative eschato-/eschatologies by facing it and demanding the abolition of heterosexual eschatologies (Yasuda 2022:89). She places queer eschatology in the realm of postcolonial and decolonial challenges against the Western eschatology to decentralise the End (Yasuda 2022:87). Yasuda also argues that eschatology is achievable by laying bare how a Telos-orientated eschatology shapes time and how transgender people are haunted by an end that bears eschatological graveness for them (Yasuda 2022:87). Giffney (2008:61) states that transgender (queer) eschatology should persistently gaze toward the future, preparing for the arrival and the end of heteronormativity, adding that '[q]ueer Eschatology would ... fantasize a queer heaven in the future or afterlife, not confronting (enough) the cruelty of the 'now' in our heteronormative world'.

Transgender interpreters contend that although gender is ill-defined, ephemeral or not particularly significant, it is important in some way, firstly because people, including transgender people, understand gender to be a fundamental part of their sense of self, and secondly, because if gender were ultimately to have no bearing, creaturely life in the eschaton might not be quite a resemblance of life as we know it in this world, causing us to stop being recognisable to ourselves (Cornwall 2022:359). Coakley (2013:283) states that gender in the eschaton 'will certainly not conform to anything we can catch and hold in gender stereotypes in this world', presumably because there would not be any gender in the afterlife. The last day will see the resurrection of transgender individuals, along with their biological sex and their related personal gender identity (Mason 2017:1 of 13).

According to Cornwall (2022:358), several implicit and explicit clues from the religious past show that after death, gender will not persist as it was on Earth, while Garcia (2018:11) narrates that our feeble, dishonourable and dying bodies will be turned into living, magnificent and powerful bodies because of the Holy Spirit's infusion and control, as the body's transformation is heralded by the resurrection. The body that will rise on the last day will be transformed, powerful, immortal and gorgeous and says Makant (2016:9), it includes biological sex and the associated personal gender identity.

4.Yasuda (2022:71) uses the term 'smaller ends' to refer to as the end of civilisation, nations, cultures, communities and people because of war, political and economic corruption and catastrophic natural events.

This article postulates that gender fluidity is not a means to an end, but rather points to something more profound and deep, to the future as an eschatological horizon where bodies will be given final significance, a life of abundance in the Trinity, the moving of the Holy Spirit and where the 'restless, fluid postmodern body can find some sense of completion without losing its mystery, without succumbing again to appropriate or restrictive gender roles' (Coakley 2000:70).

People are experiencing a growing awareness of gender incongruence (Health Direct n.d.).⁵ The Sydney Report (2017), titled 'A theology of gender and gender identity', states that discussions on transgenderism have provoked more discussions on appropriate clinical and pastoral responses to gender. Research shows that over the past decade, different views on sex and gender arose, specifically those of people who experience gender congruence. Christians discuss sex and gender issues in light of the biblical principles of creation, including how human sin has corrupted and disordered it, how Christ's atonement has restored it and how eschatological hope holds out the possibility of renewal and restoration. It recognises the worth of every person as one made 'in the image of God, the biblical commandments of kindness and love' and the necessity of living by trust in Christ in submissive obedience to God's word (Sydney Report 2017).

The Holy Spirit and the 'Already/Not Yet' principle

The arrival of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament leads to both an eschatological anticipation of God's future work and the fulfilment of earlier eschatological expectations. The work of the Spirit makes future aspects of salvation a reality by giving us a foretaste of what is to come. The pneumatology is replete with this 'already/not yet' eschaton reality (Gabriel 2016:210).

The Spirit is the one who guarantees and guards our inheritance for the future, as his eschatological work continues through the future resurrection of believers. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is directly linked with Jesus' exaltation, according to Acts 2:33: 'Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear'.

As the agent of inaugurated eschatology, the Holy Spirit forms and sanctifies the moral belief of a Christian society and promotes, among other, koinonia, social transformation, liberation, peace and the nurturing of the marginalised (Falconer 2018:97). With the coming of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God as the rule of God broke into history as a new inaugurated reality, into the world, being here but not of this world, both concealing and exposing, and is real but invisible (Eliastam 2009:vii, 124).

⁵'Gender incongruence' is the term people use when they choose another gender than the one they were born with. People with gender incongruence may describe themselves as transgender (trans) or gender diverse (2024 Healthdirect Australia Limited).

At Pentecost, God's promises were fulfilled, allowing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ to continue and advance the goal of creation for, in and with us (König 1989:42). It inaugurated the Kingdom of God's sacrament, and we will be empowered to bear witness to Christ's presence and the message of the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost marked the beginning of the end times, which are symbolised by Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Falconer 2018:97). Eliastam (2009) confirms:

[T]he power that transforms the body at the resurrection is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings the future into the present, but in a way that is partial and incomplete. At the resurrection, the power of the Holy Spirit will be experienced to a degree that is utterly transforming and which reconstitutes our humanity. (p. 137)

The eschatological nature of the Spirit ought to compel us to embrace the 'radical nature of the authority' God has granted us. 'The Spirit is the foretaste of the age to come' (1 Cor 2:9–10; cf. Heb 6:4–5), as well as the 'first fruits' (Rm 8:23) and the 'down payment (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, Eph 1:13–14) of our future inheritance'. The world should get a glimpse of the Kingdom by how believers treat one another' because those who are experiencing the powers of the age to come should be living examples of that age (Keener 2018:9). Robertson (2019:23) states that the Holy Spirit is also working in and 'through sexual minorities to bring about redemption and renewal in contemporary Christianity'. Carroll (2021:2) argues that although it is essential for our confession, it is easy to forget that the Christian religion is not only in the now but also in the future. It suggests that salvation is a fact that has already been revealed and started although it must still be completed. 'The eschatological gift of the Spirit is the fruit of God's liberating love' (Carroll 2021:2) also for transgender people.

After his resurrection, the last Adam has given his followers the life-giving Spirit. But according to Mason (2017), it does not imply an 'ontological fusion' between Christ and the Spirit, but rather that:

Christ is so identified with the Spirit that the Spirit becomes his Spirit: 'to have the Spirit is to have Christ; to have Christ is to have the Spirit'. (p. 8)

Therefore, just as God breathed the breath of life into Adam, the rising Christ breathed the Spirit into his disciples (Jn 20:22).

Jesus told his disciples in John 16:7 that it is to their advantage that he goes away and that he will live and work through the Holy Spirit, who will lead them in truth, conviction and redemption of sin, righteousness, and judgement (Jn 16:8). People are transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ by the coming and work of the Holy Spirit, according to 2 Corinthians 3:18 (Mason 2017:8 of 13).

Although the inaugurated eschatology has already begun, we are still waiting for the Holy Spirit's future work; thus, an eschatological tension exists between what is 'now' and the

'not yet' and points to the link between the Kingdom of God and the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Gabriel 2016:207). Gabriel (2016:208) claims that the Spirit is the mark of the new covenant (not of the letter but of the Spirit), and it is the Spirit that gives life (2 Cor 3:6), the one who guides us to transform into the image of Jesus, with ever-increasing glory.

In Paul's eschatological context, the 'already' and 'not yet' are important because, according to Cornwall (2007:181), without it, the resurrection runs the risk of either being completely separated from the body or reduced to a psychological event that only affects the disciples rather than being a universal event. Paul views the resurrection as something that the believer already participates in as it is rooted in the historical resurrection of Christ, but it is also somehow deferred to the end of time. This is important because we live in the 'already', and as believers we have been made new as Paul argues in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation'. However, we still live in an imperfect, fallen world while we wait for Jesus' return when all the remaining imperfect bodies and the world will be transformed and renewed. The 'already/not yet' principle implies that believers actively and directly participate in the Kingdom of God.

Paul's use of the phrase 'in Christ' implies experiencing the eschatological tension that results from the fact that, despite God's previous grace and redemption of them from slavery (1 Cor 2:20), Christians still commit sin, still die and still require a complete transformation into the likeness of Christ. Christians enjoy Christ and his gifts, but when redemption is complete, there will be incomparably more to come (Thiselton 2000:90). One of the many 'in Christ' texts that describe the new reality brought about by the in-breaking Kingdom of God is Galatians 3:26–29. The religious Christian community should define and build the future, which is already permeating the present, in all facets of life, including transgender relations (Eliastam 2009:127).

Although diverse views and theories exist on how this will happen and how the change will be affected, a consensus exists that it points to the coming of the Kingdom of God (Eliastam 2009:93). The Kingdom as 'already' and 'not yet' gives rise to an eschatological tension between the present and the future, where the coming of the Kingdom implies that we both live in this age and the one to come. We live in the present Kingdom, as God's reign is breaking into this world with the knowledge (eschatological hope) of a future reality while waiting for the final consummation (Eliastam 2009:118).

At the resurrection, the Holy Spirit will fill and control our weak and dying bodies (those of us who are then still on Earth) and transform them into living, glorious bodies. This is the start of a glorious transformation into the image of God. Because it signifies our renewal and reintegration as moral beings, the resurrection is good news. The risen Christ has sent the Spirit to his followers to transform and change them altogether, down to the depths of their beings, even in the lowest and most challenging parts of their life, rather than merely their mortal bodies (Mason 2017:12 of 13).

According to 1 Corinthians 15 and Luke 20:27–39, eschatological hope is fundamentally linked with bodily resurrection. Paul ties the resurrection of our bodies to the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15) and states in Philippians 3:21 that our bodies will resemble Christ's magnificent body. As a result, the body of the resurrected Christ serves as a model for the resurrection of our bodies and helps us to understand its nature (Eliastam 2009:136).

The Kingdom of God must necessarily come in a hermeneutical way (cf. Carroll 2021:3), so that people can use their past experience to find a way to the salvific reality, which is Christ's revelation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This indicates that Christian salvation lives in a condition of 'already/not yet', realised in an interaction between positive and negative experiences that is rooted in the reality that the Kingdom of God has yet to become fully realised but can partially be witnessed through history. However, for Carroll (2021:3), this world is insufficient for transgender people because there exists a future in which queerness may be fully realised, Muñoz (2009:1, cited by Carroll 2021:3) endorses it: 'Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the impasse of the present'.

The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost on all genders – thus all human beings that are his followers, are equal through the Holy Spirit. As a redemptive movement, it brings a sense of equality when and where gender inequality persists. It is my position that all genders are eligible for this Spirit-given gift.

The Image of God: A symbol for transgender inclusion and human dignity

The teachings, practices and structures of Christianity have history and continue to do so in gendered ways (Beattie 2014). Genesis 1 presents the beginning of humanity. Humanity was given the power to dominate, fill and conquer the planet through reproduction after being created as male and female in God's image and likeness.

All people are ontologically and fundamentally the same. Every person was made in the image of God, and therefore we all possess the same worth and dignity. The *imago Dei* identifies the core of who we are as people. Our gender, as well as cultural, emotional and experiential factors, is crucial but not essential (Esqueda 2018). The idea of the *imago Dei* can be used as a sign representing the worth of each individual and the dignity of all genders and is a symbol that can be used against all forms of gender inequality (Szczerba 2020:13).

The concept of the *imago Dei* can be used to symbolise inclusion and fundamental human dignity for transgender people. One's identity is in the core of one's character, being created in God's image (Lidums 2004:78). We are not only created in God's image but also as God's image, which is significant for the dignity and identity of all human beings,

including transgender people. Although much has been done to enhance transgender equality, there is still a widespread abuse and violence against these groups (Marumo & Chakale 2019:8). The concept of the *imago Dei* can serve as a religious symbol of inclusion and human dignity (Szczerba 2020:14).

Robertson (2019:49) makes a case for transgenders in the Church in what he calls 'a more inclusive vision for the Kingdom of God'. He uses Peter (Ac 10:9–16) to argue his views on the inclusivity of transgenders in the Kingdom of God as created in God's image. Peter who fell into a God-induced trance received the calling in a dream to preach the gospel to unclean gentiles. He heard the voice of God saying, 'Stand up, kill, and eat'. After he replied that he could not kill and eat unclean animals, God responded, 'Do not call unclean which I have made clean'. After Peter's trance, Cornelius requested him to come and preach the gospel to him and his household. That is when Peter realised the vision was not about unclean animals but unclean people. For Robertson (2019:53), the conversion of the gentiles became the cornerstone for an inclusive theology, as Cheng (2011:8) notes that the dissolution of clean and unclean started with the ministry of Jesus Christ and his interactions with 'unholy' individuals that became the theological approach of the earliest prophets.

Referring to Peter as an example to argue for the inclusion of transgender people, Robertson (2019:54) opines that the authors of the Bible came to understand that gender and sex evolved towards an egalitarian approach, and it points to an ethical trajectory of a more liberating and inclusive posture for all people. If this is true for women, Robertson argues, the same trajectories are also key to the inclusion of transgender people. Kirk (2016) states that:

For the same reason that we cannot claim anymore that men are better than women, for the same reason that we do not hold to a biblical view of marriage in which a man owns his wife, for the same reason that we err in excluding women from leading as they are gifted by the Spirit, the ground has been cut out from the ancient framework that excludes the notion of same-sex intercourse. (n.p.)

Robertson (2019:57) states that social views in the Bible dominated non-conforming effeminate men by keeping them under their power to control and influence society. If a trajectory of liberation for sex and social class is visible, there should also be a trajectory of liberation for sexual minorities. The Holy Spirit is working in and through sexual and gender minorities to bring about redemption and renewal in the Christian faith, while the ethical trajectories of the biblical texts generally point towards more inclusive ways of perceiving and being in the world (Robertson 2019:23).

Theologically, our identities are revealed in our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Through the concepts of inclusion and human dignity, transgender people are part of the *imago Dei* in the same way. The *imago Dei* includes all genders, regardless of religious beliefs, because the *imago Dei* should serve as a symbol for the inclusion of all genders to be treated with human dignity.

Conclusion: Listen to their voices

I often say that trans bodies are cathedrals.

Why? Because cathedrals are so often partially knocked down, and rebuilt, and different parts are in utterly distinct styles, and they're still beautiful, still holy.

Even filled with scaffolding.

Even in the middle of being remade. (Hulme, J., 2021, [Twitter] 9 October. Available at: [@jayhulmepoet](https://twitter.com/jayhulmepoet) (Viewed 9 October 2021).

This article aimed to discuss transgender people suffering under stigmatisation, prejudice and social exclusion as if they are excluded from being human and therefore created in the image of God. The focus is on transgender identity, the concept of inaugurated eschatology as the 'already/not yet' with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the restoration of God's image and the inclusion of transgender people in the Kingdom of God. Transgender people also form part of the *imago Dei*, which symbolises the inclusion and human dignity of all human beings.

The transgender movement is growing, and Christianity needs to address this issue with wisdom. We must acknowledge that transgender people's bodies, sexuality and selfhood are participating in the Kingdom of God. As a result, an inaugurated eschatological reality implies that transgender individuals might come to know themselves through the Holy Spirit's transformational process, not by looking backward to a predetermined order but by looking forward to beginning a road of unexpected transformation.

Transgender authors such as Yasuda, Roberson and Carroll, whose documents are used in this article, express the need to be heard and seek peaceful integration and inclusion in the Christian community, together with the opportunity to demonstrate that, even though they are transgender, they are like any other Christian.

From creation to Christ's birth, suffering and resurrection, the human body is fundamental to the Christian faith. Being embodied souls does not mean that souls are imprisoned in bodies. Thus, being physically embodied is a fundamental component of the human experience, including the experience of transgender people. We 'are' our bodies and they are excellent, not just that we 'have' them.

If we reason that believers are one in Christ, then we should do everything in our ability to prevent exclusion and promote the inclusion of transgender people. Humans do not exactly know what the nature of the bodily resurrection is. Yet they can comprehend that there are still suffering bodies that prompt people to seek as much of their redemption as they can here on Earth.

We must grow a culture where we can listen to the voices of transgender individuals who are confronted with the

bodies that they were born with, but experience estrangement from their biological sex. Considering this, we might interpret their transition in a theologically eschatological manner, in order to promote healing and wholeness – a wholeness that serves holiness in that it creates a space for an embodied encounter with reciprocal grace. God's in-breaking into the world to come, gives us hope for redemption, resurrection and reconciliation, and this hope includes transgender people.

Queer people were denied the opportunity to live as fully human beings and are often entrapped in a society that fundamentally negates their existence. Although they understand that this world is not the end to everything, a future for queerness and transgenders can be fully realised in the eschaton. Muñoz (2009) states:

Queerness is not here yet. Queerness is an identity. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an identity that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Thus, transgender identity is the hope for a better fluid future. (p. 37)

There is a moral order in creation that God constructed for the formation of human beings, including their sex, gender and gender identity. The resurrection strengthens, renews and perfects this moral order and speaks to questions of gender dysphoria difficulties in general and ethical challenges with a gender reassignment in particular. One can only say this with sensitivity, gentleness and patience, as well as clarity. We are not autonomous moral agents possessing absolute authority over our bodies and their sexual form; we live in a moral space that is shaped by God's purposes in creation and its renewal in the resurrection.

Despite the fluidity of gender (and the resulting implicit potential to diverge), having a sex is different from being a gender, as it 'presumes a fixed body' through which gender may be performed or onto which gender can be 'carved out'. To speculate about the possibility of having several genders and ask what it means to enact trans identities, people seldom examine the possibility of not having any visibly gendered traits.

An eschatological vision of inclusivity is a reality for transgender Christians who have their own physical concerns and who experience rejection and shame. I concur with Grenz (2001:321–322) that transgender people who are united with Jesus Christ share a relationship with God as the Son is the eternal Son. Even while this is already the case, the ecclesial self,⁶ which comprised of participation in divine life, remains fundamentally future and is only partially present in this era. Therefore, the ecclesial self is essentially eschatological.

6. For a further discussion on the ecclesial self, see Grenz (2001:303, 305, 312–331).

We all have moral and social responsibilities and should react against the abuse and exploitation of transgender people. All genders have a human nature, given to us by God's action in creation and are equally ontologically interconnected parts of the same body. We are responsible for reflecting the relational *imago Dei* towards each other as brothers and sisters, whether we agree on gender issues or not.

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Author's contribution

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