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**Review of Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (Gender, Theology and Spirituality Series), London & Oakville, CT: Equinox 2010, 273 pages, ISBN: 978-0-19-5311-62-4 (pb).**

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Early on in her volume *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology*, Susannah Cornwall notes that the incidence of intersex/SDS (Disorders of Sexual Development) conditions is estimated to be found in 1 in 2,500 children in Europe and North America (although this estimate is contended). One of the subsequent themes she develops is detailing how such conditions are relatively rare, much misunderstood and frequently marginalized medical categories that have been perceived from differing historical and cultural perspectives. This includes the fashion in which the Christian Church has approached the subject. Evidence suggests its views have largely been negative given that hitherto and presently dominant Christian theological strands stress the integrity of the body and the goodness of God reflected in the creative order but only in such a way as to conform to the culturally constructed 'complementary' of 'normal' male and female physiology.

This volume is part of the series published by Equinox entitled *Gender, Theology and Spirituality* (series editors Lisa Isherwood and Marcella Althaus-Reid) exploring the notion that theology and spirituality

are essentially engendered activities and arguing for the necessity to create a space for alternative readings questioning the notions of gender itself, thus endeavouring to push back theological boundaries. This particular volume stems from Cornwall's PhD thesis based on two main sources of literature: non-theological works from sociology and history, and theological works on the topics of transgender, disability and queer theology, while making extensive use of previous intersex/DSD testimonies and television interviews. The volume is to be welcomed in that it constitutes the first detailed analysis of the theological implications of physical intersex/SDS conditions and medical interventions around them that would seemingly undermine the 'natural' male-female relationship. The work is informed by existing theologies from the three marginal areas of transsexualism, disability and queer theology, yet is noteworthy in that it forges a way ahead in constructing a theology around intersex/SDS conditions. Given its engagement with these areas, the volume should however attract wider interest than merely fields of theology.

Chapter 1 considers the causes and medical definitions of intersex/DSD and overviews the paltry selection of extant work on the condition, while providing an overview of the subject matter of the volume that essentially calls for an image of God and of humanity more complex and diverse than an all-encompassing male-female binary allows, and wondering how this reflection might impact theologies in the future, however, Cornwall is quick to advocate that such fresh theologies should not provide a self-enforcing totality and construct an all-encompassing ontology in their own right and thereby sustain an integrity which has space for contributions from other theological inputs or indeed sociological critiques.

Chapter 2 provides an outline of how intersex/DSD conditions have been treated and understood at different points in history in order to understand their relationship to sociocultural norms of sex and gender, and thereafter charts a way to see how theological attitudes to sex and gender have both influenced and been influenced by sociocultural norms. Cornwall explores how definitions of what actually renders an individual male or female have changed over time and are not necessarily as unwavering as might be anticipated. Hence, intersex/DSD conditions, she argues, must be seen in this context of historical relativity. In short, the whole structure of gender relies upon an appearance of internal coherence between sex, gender and sexuality, but, as Cornwall points out, these labels are never finished and are being continually redefined once it is recognized that it is

society which sustains the myth of completed norms in the relationship between all three.

Chapter 3 engages with critiques of prevailing Christian theologies including that expounded in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. This has been particularly influential on later views of intersex/DSD conditions through its extensive identification of male-female complementarity and response with the presumed correlative relationship between God and humanity which have reinforced patterns of binary sex, and its assumption that ambiguous sex does not adequately reflect God's plan for humanity. The chapter considers the implications of this for the Church's limitations of images of the body in stereotypical form and the possibility of intersex/DSD theology adding radically to that image. More broadly, it raises matters of sexed identity and appropriate sexual behaviour, or, as Cornwall puts it, matters of what it is legitimate to *do* in bodies and what it means to be *in* bodies.

Chapter 4 reassigns and redefines intersex/DSD in the light of theologies derived from transgenderism through the main contributions which have often been forged by personal experiences, including experiences within the Christian churches. The chapter also considers how issues of intersex have been inadequately dealt with and frequently misunderstood. In this respect Cornwall highlights the Church of England's statement on the subject, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991), and the treatment by the major umbrella of evangelical churches in the UK, the Evangelical Alliance, and the problematic model it offers based on tenuous biblical references which seemingly enforce 'normal' male and female physiology text rather than scientific understanding.

Chapter 5 demonstrates in detail intersex/DSD conditions in the context of disabilities and conjectures that impaired bodies transcend conceptual boundaries by straddling the usually mutually exclusive categories of health and pathology, thus challenging the theological or moral significance sometimes associated with each of them. . Here, Cornwall points out that while some impairments inherently prevent certain physical activities, intersexed bodies are able to do many of the things that non-intersexed bodies can and that these are only rendered problematic by societal assumptions.

Chapter 6 explores how queer theologies are important resources for thinking theologically about intersex/DSD because intersex/DSD bodies are simultaneously perceived as dichotomies including male/female, healthy/pathological, normal/abnormal, natural/unnatural. Cornwall suggests that theology derived from queer theory is a profitable way

forward in that it challenges and contests sexual boundaries and essentialist portrayals of sex, and stands in radical contrast to heteronormativity. She argues that queer theologies have the potential to provide an important site of positionality for those individuals who find that their bodies or sex-gender identities cannot easily be categorized or demarcated.

The concluding chapter advocates a project of education on and engagement with issues of intersex/DSD and otherwise atypical physical or sex-gender configuration in the Christian Church which would enable appropriate pastoral care and constructive debate. Since Christian ethics and praxis should be rooted in theology, these, too, must reflect the diverse and non-binary character of human sex. Cornwall argues that the deconstruction of male and female as essential or all-embracing human categories invariably transforms conceptions of legitimate bodiliness and what it means for human sex to reflect God.

*Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ* brings the innovation of a theology derived from intersex/DSD conditions and demonstrates the necessity of resisting erotic domination in defining bodies that have increasingly been examined within sociological and critical analysis. This is not without its difficulties. Cornwall is obliged to use the terms 'male' and 'female' in reference to sex, rather than an abbreviation for 'man' and 'woman' which she prefers to use as culturally gendered rather than sexed notions, while she recognizes that even this terminology is invariably open to criticism. That acknowledged, the importance of this volume is not just in filling a gap in Christian theology but developing a theology based on the desire to protect the vulnerable and critique heteronormative ideologies. Moreover, Cornwall makes the plea that fresh theologies which value incarnation must also address matters of stigmatized or marginal bodies and legitimate the non-pathology of intersexed/DSD conditions. Or, stated otherwise, a discussion of atypical bodies necessitates a radical re-examination of discourses about sex, marriage, sexuality, perfection, healing and, in the Christian tradition, the resurrected body. The volume includes a useful glossary of some of the major intersexed/DSD conditions and related terminology.