

**A Christian  
Perspective  
on Gender  
Expansiveness**

# Core theological claims

All are created in the image of God. All means all. And God doesn't make mistakes.

We are judged by our care for the most vulnerable.

- This is a central claim in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.
  - The classic formulation is “orphan, widow, immigrant, and poor”
  - Jesus was formed by that tradition and like other rabbis elaborated to include folks who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, disabled, as well as children, women, and sex workers.
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# Genesis 1 “male and female God created them”

*God created humanity in God's own image,  
in the divine image God created them,  
male and female God created them.*

Genesis 1:27

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**God separated the light from the darkness.  
God named the light Day and the darkness Night.**

Genesis 1:4b-5a

Thankfully, that includes much more than just pure light and pure darkness...

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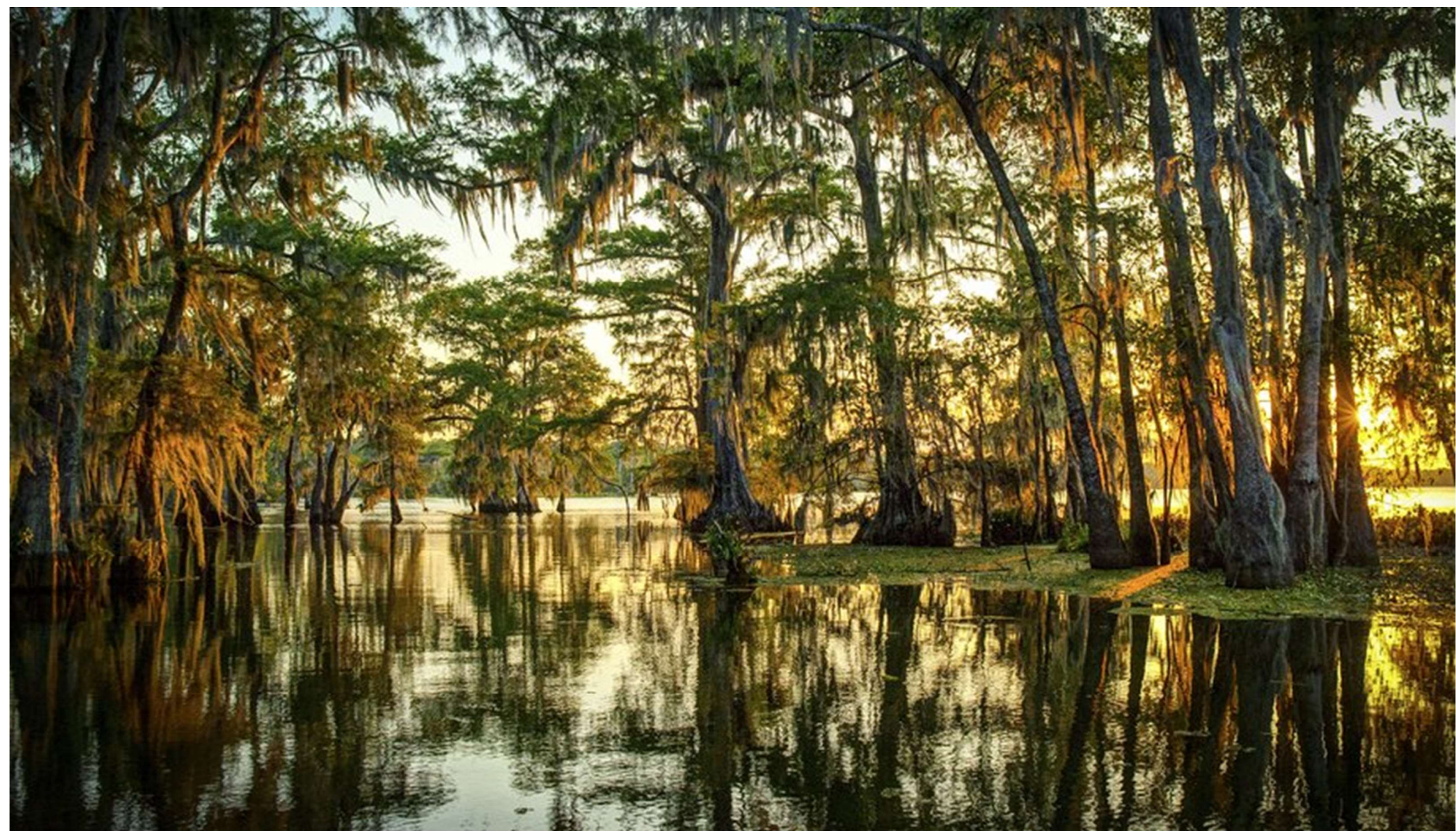
**God named the dry land Earth...  
and the gathered waters Seas...**

Genesis 1:10a

Thankfully, that includes all kinds of in-between spaces, too...

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# An expansive creation... an expansive Christ

We don't read Genesis 1:1-25 as true binaries or an exhaustive list that excludes all that is in between, or both, or simply unmentioned.

Why would we read Genesis 1:26 differently than the rest of the chapter?

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**Merism:** a rhetorical device in which a combination of two contrasting parts of the whole refer to the whole: e.g. searching high and low; flesh and bone; young and old.

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*  
Revelation 22:13

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## The Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8:26-39

Apostle Philip was walking down a desert road when he encounters an Ethiopian eunuch returning from worship in Jerusalem. He was in charge of the queen's treasury.

He was reading Isaiah and asked Philip to get in the carriage and help him understand what he was reading. Philip shares the story of Jesus, and the eunuch, seeing a river nearby, immediately asks "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" So, Philip baptizes him. Then Philip disappears and the eunuch continues on his way rejoicing.

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# A complicated character

He was...

- Ethiopian: African, “the ends of the earth,” foreign, dark-skinned
- An observer of Jewish practices: religious identity unclear, possibly a “God-fearer” (Gentile who follows Jewish law)
- Wealthy and powerful
- Likely enslaved or formerly enslaved: unusual for a free person to be castrated

The eunuch’s very body and identities break boundaries and categories.

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# Eunuchs

“Eunuchs were commonly created [in the Ancient Near East] in order to form a group of people considered neither male nor female—people who could move easily between gendered spaces.”

(Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*)

Saris (סריס): A male who does not develop secondary sex characteristics at puberty or has their sex characteristics removed. One can be "naturally" born a saris (saris hamah) or one can become a saris through human intervention (saris adam).

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## Are eunuchs in or out?

*“No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.” Deuteronomy 23:1*

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*“Don’t let the immigrant who has joined with the Lord say, “The Lord will exclude me from the people.” And don’t let the eunuch say, “I’m just a dry tree.” The Lord says: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, choose what I desire, and remain loyal to my covenant: In my temple and courts, I will give them a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give to them an enduring name that won’t be removed.”*  
Isaiah 56:3-5

Philip, following the understanding of God that he experienced in Jesus, welcomes the eunuch to the community immediately and fully.

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# What is to prevent me from being baptized?

Early Christian community was characterized by boundary breaking experiences:

- All nations of Jews
- All genders
- Slave and free
- Rich and poor
- Even Gentiles

There is an overarching movement of scripture toward ever-widening inclusion.

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28*

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# Gender in early Christianity

Understanding and expressing one's gender—which may differ from one's sex assigned at birth—can be a spiritual experience that draws us closer to God and neighbor. This is not new. This is ancient.

For at least the first 300 years...

Some Christian men chose to castrate themselves and/or live outside of the boundaries of their assigned sex as a form of religious devotion, sexual asceticism, and giving up power.

Some Christian women embraced or were assigned male identity in a variety of ways: through dress, sexual abstinence, assuming the gender roles of men, transcending the gender roles of women, and physical modifications.

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# God created all. And all means all.\*

*“God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.”*

Genesis 1:31a

\*no exceptions

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