

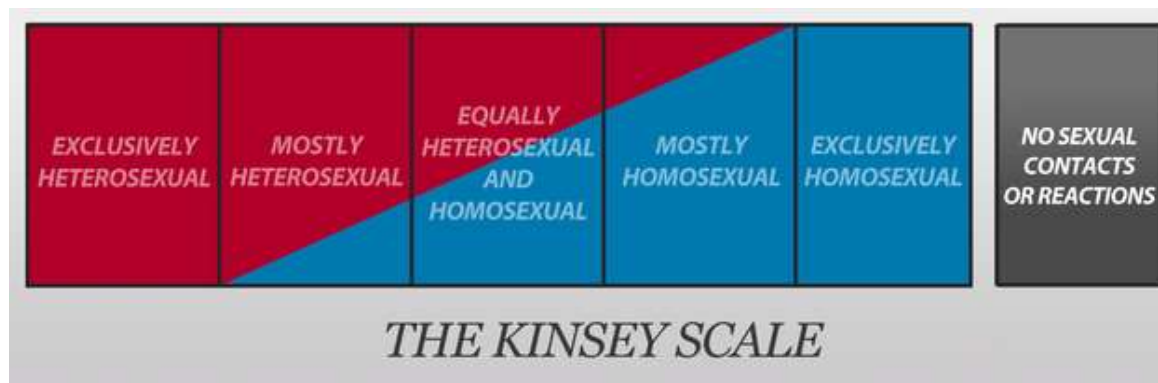
Supplemental images and narrative to
Is Your God Big Enough? Close Enough? You Enough?
Jesus and the Three Faces of God
by Paul Smith



CHAPTER 7
GOD, JESUS, AND GENDER
(pages 165-174)

What we *know* about Jesus' sexuality and gender is that he was seen as a man by his family and others. What we don't know are things like:

1. **Where did Jesus fall on the heterosexual/homosexual scale?** Overall, 89% of Americans describe themselves as heterosexual. Currently around 4% of Americans identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. In Jesus' day those categories as orientations did not exist. But we know from behaviors that they were present and prevalent, especially in Greek and Roman society. As



attitudes change today, more people seem to be willing to be honest about their sexual orientation. For instance, in a recent study, 6% of young adults identified as

totally homosexual. With increasing acceptance, the numbers of those willing to honestly report their sexual orientation will certainly mean more people will feel free to identify as homosexual.

People assume that Jesus was a “normal” person. The problem is that every group defines normal with their image in mind. Those in the majority and those in power sway the common understanding their way. Therefore a “normal” person for much of the world is a heterosexual man and woman. But normal is better defined as a range with a large population. That means at least straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.

in the last big US survey, 10% of women and 3% of men who identified themselves as “heterosexual” also reported some same-sex contact.

2. Did Jesus have the sexual organs most common among men? Or was he one of the estimated



1.7 percent (UN study) of the world’s current population that is born intersex. Intersex is the development of genitalia somewhere between typical male and female genitalia.

Participants at the third International Intersex Forum, Malta, in December 2013



Unless you are a greenfly or an amoeba or, when it comes to being close to others, we living beings come with varying forms of sexuality, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Sex is about biological maleness and femaleness. Gender refers to behavioral, cultural, and psychological traits typically associated with one sex. Gender identity is how someone feels about their gender assignment. This is a spectrum with some people identifying as male, some female, some transgender, or gender fluid. Others are gender-neutral and don't associate with gender at all. Sexual orientation refers to the direction of a person's romantic and sexual attractions, and there appears to be greater diversity here than we have previously thought.

Straight (heterosexual) people are primarily attracted to someone of the opposite gender, men to women, women to men. Lesbians (gay women) are women attracted to other women. Homosexuals (gay men) are men attracted to other men. Bisexual people can be attracted both to someone of the same gender and someone of a different gender. Pansexuals (sometimes called omnisexuality or polysexuality) refers to feeling attraction to people regardless of their gender identities, sex, or sexual orientation. Asexuals are not romantically or sexually attracted to other people at all, though they may still enjoy close and intimate relationships. How about all of that for

God's boundless creativity! Does this mean that relating to God up close in the intimate way that Jesus provides is just not available for lots of folks who do not fit "normal"? No, indeed!



Transgender persons are those whose sense of personal identity does not correspond with the gender assigned to them at birth

Transgender Jesus
from the album cover
Androgynous Jesus by
Must

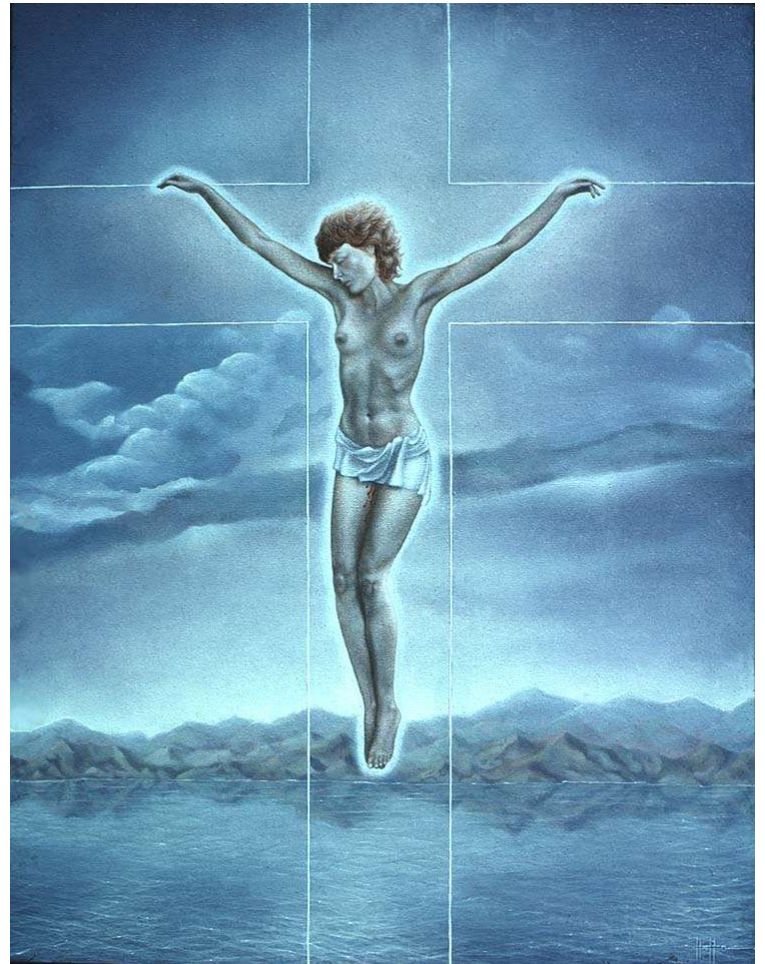
Jesus of the People
by *Janet McKenzie,*
using an African
American women as a
model for Jesus.





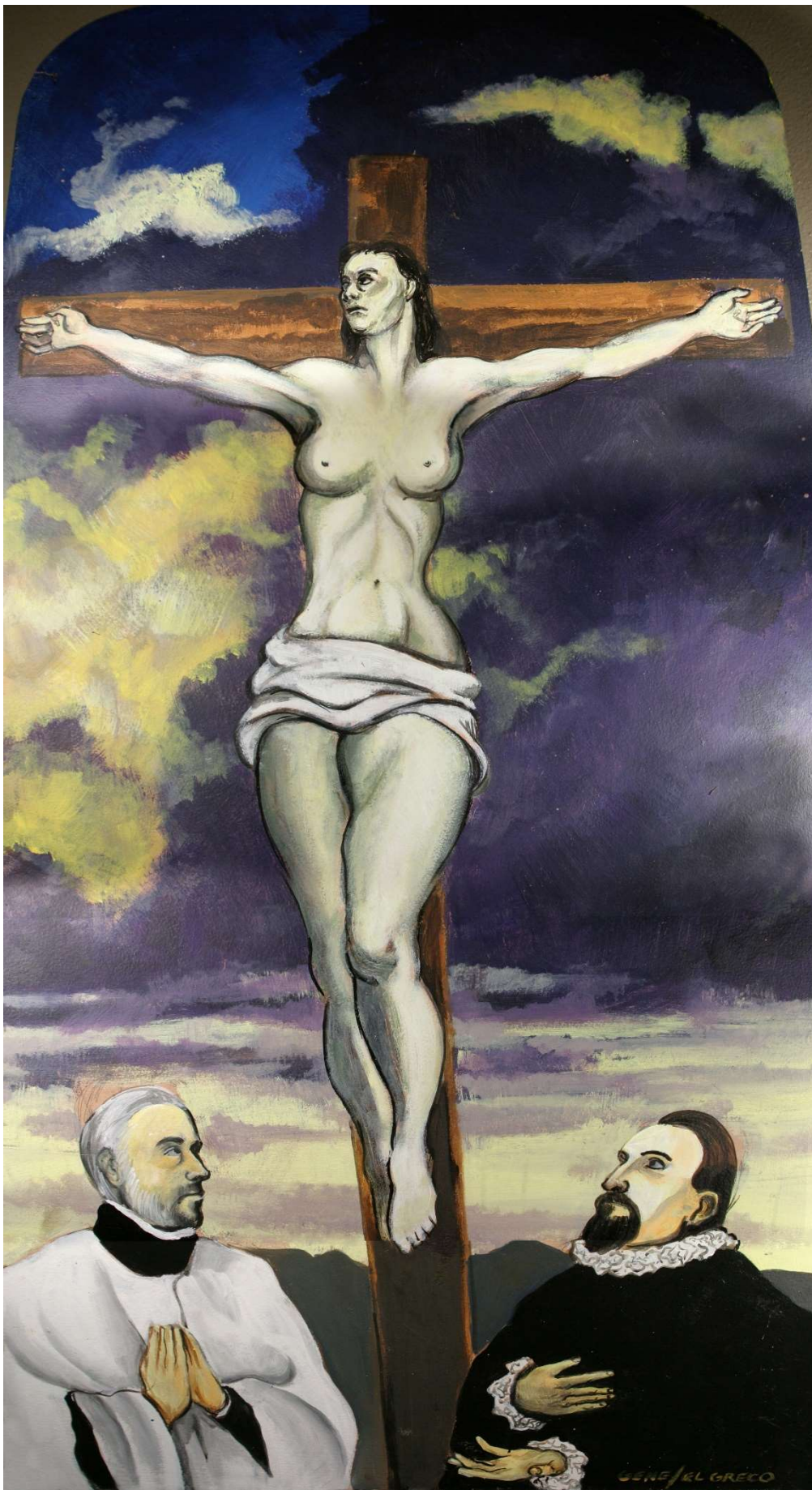
Artist's abstract rendition of Jesus as both man and woman.

The crucifixion has been a vivid field for artists' depictions of Jesus since women, like Jesus, have been oppressed and crucified for being who they are down through the centuries. This justice emphasis then makes a secondary point in helping us lose our deadly grip on the maleness of Jesus as some kind of determination of the gender of God, or at least who should be in charge in the church (male pastors and priests).



In 1984, **Christa**, this 4-foot, 250-pound figure hung in New York's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine — although, thanks to the Bishop's commentary and a barrage of hate mail, only briefly. Due to the aggressive backlash, the sculpture was promptly packed up and shipped out soon after its arrival.

British artist Edwina Sandys — the daughter of Winston Churchill—fashioned the sculpture in 1974.



After El Greco

Anonymous

This was painted especially for the Faces of Jesus Gallery originally at Broadway Church in Kansas City. The artist has replaced the male Christ figure of El Greco's famous Christ on the Cross Adored by Two Donors with a female Christ figure. There, strikingly, the two donor priests now become obvious abusers of the female Jesus as they are part of a church dominated for centuries by men. Jesus on the cross identifies with all the persecuted of the world. Women are the largest group on the face of the earth who have been, and today are consistently persecuted and denied opportunity to be all that they are meant to be. Ironically, it is the leaders of religions of all kinds who support this oppression.

Virtuous Giving
Michael Floyd in 1990



Drawn by Broadway Church member and hung in the original Faces of Jesus Gallery there.

People tend to either love or hate this depiction of Jesus in female form. When viewed horizontally we see a woman on a birthing table ready to give birth.



Meister Eckhart, the great Christian mystic, wrote, "What does God do all day long? God gives birth. From all eternity, God lies on a maternity bed giving birth."



An abstract Divine Feminine



Rassouli Sophia Divine Feminine Goddess

Rassouli.com



Mary carries Good News not only with Jesus but with gender healing.

God/She is very aware of Her/His/It's creative diversity and our challenges. Someone says, "Wait a minute. Jesus was a man and we can't change that!" This is true. *But a greater truth is that God comes to us in whatever way we need!* A wonderful example of this is found in the spiritual experience of our Catholic brothers and sisters. The Roman Catholic church is an extremely

patriarchal institution and images God in only male terms, and its primary leadership excludes women. This has been a wounding for faithful Catholics through the centuries. So what did God do? She began showing up in profound Catholic visionary events in the form of Mary!



The Pontevedra apparitions are the Marian apparitions that Sister Lúcia, the Portuguese visionary of Our Lady of Fátima, The last surviving seer, now Sister Lúcia, is living in a Dorothean convent in Pontevedra, Spain.

Sister Lúcia described the vision that occurred on December 10, 1925: "The Most Holy Virgin appeared to me, and by her side, elevated on a luminous cloud, was the Child Jesus. The Most Holy Virgin rested her hand on my shoulder and as she did so, she showed me a heart encircled by thorns, which she was holding in her other hand."

The two children, living as shepherds who had visions of Mary in Fatima were declared saints by Pope Francis in 2017.





Bernadette Soubirous is best known for the Marian apparitions of a "young lady" who asked for a chapel to be built at the nearby garbage dump of the cave-grotto at Massabielle where apparitions are said to have occurred between 11 February and 16 July 1858.

Despite initial skepticism from the Catholic Church, Soubirous's claims were eventually declared "worthy of belief" after a canonical investigation, and the Marian apparition is now known as Our Lady of Lourdes.

Mary has been one of the strongest symbols across the Middle East for unity, across religions, tribes and nations.

Interesting headlines on ABC news article:

Why millions of Muslims are seeing apparitions of the Mother Mary

Wednesday 17 July 2013 10:23AM

Margaret Coffey

IMAGE: AN EGYPTIAN MUSLIM WOMAN HOLDS A CROSS WITH A KORAN AS SHE JOINS COPTIC CHRISTIANS AT THE VIRGIN MARY CHURCH IN THE IMBABA DISTRICT OF CAIRO. (KHALED DESOUKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

Why have apparitions of the Mother Mary appeared across the Muslim world in recent decades, /reported by ABC news

Christ Sophia, the wisdom of God

We can see a form of Jesus as feminine in the Bible when Paul equates Christ with the “Wisdom (σοφία, sophia) of God.” This arresting statement in 1 Cor. 1: 24, “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom (sophia) of God,” brings with it a rich biblical and Christian history because the Greek feminine word for wisdom, Sophia, is the personification of God.

Sophia is a central understanding in the Orthodox Church as an expression of the second person of the Holy Trinity in the Orthodox Church. as well as in the Old Testament, as seen in Proverbs



Artwork from a medieval [codex](#) depicting [Hildegard of Bingen](#)'s vision of Sophia.



Ukrainian Icon, *Sophia, the Holy Wisdom*

In Roman Catholic mysticism, the Doctor of the Church St. Hildegard of Bingen celebrated Sophia as a cosmic figure in both her writing and her art. Sophia, in Catholic theology, is the eternal Wisdom of God.

A one-page study for those who like to know
what the Bible says about Christ Sophia the Wisdom of God

In understanding and interpreting Christ, the New Testament uses various strands from the ideas of wisdom in the Old Testament. First, like wisdom, Christ pre-existed all things and dwelt with God (John 1:1–2); second, the lyric language about wisdom being the breath of the divine power, reflecting divine glory, mirroring light, and being an image of God, appears to be echoed by 1 Corinthians 1:17–18, 24–5 (verses which associate divine wisdom with power), by Hebrews 1:3 ("he is the radiance of God's glory"), John 1:9 ("the true light that gives light to everyone"), and Colossians 1:15 ("the image of the invisible God"). Third, the New Testament applies to Christ the language about wisdom's cosmic significance as God's agent in the creation of the world: "all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3; see Col 1:16 Heb 1:2). Fourth, faced with Christ's crucifixion, Paul vividly transforms the notion of divine wisdom's inaccessibility (1 Cor. 1:17–2:13). "The wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:21) is not only "secret and hidden" (1 Cor. 2:7) but also, defined by the cross and its proclamation, downright folly to the wise of this world (1 Cor. 1:18–25; see also Matt 11:25–7). Fifth, through his parables and other ways, Christ teaches wisdom (Matt 25:1–12 Luke 16:1–18, cf. also Matt 11:25–30). He is 'greater' than Solomon, the Old Testament wise person and teacher par excellence (Matt 12:42).

The New Testament eventually not only ascribes wisdom roles to Christ, but also makes the equation "divine wisdom=Christ" quite explicit. Luke reports how the boy Jesus grew up "filled with wisdom" (Luke 2:40; see Luke 2:52). Later, Christ's fellow-countrymen were astonished "at the wisdom given to him" (Mark 6:2). Matthew 11:19 thinks of him as divine wisdom being "proved right by his deeds" (see, however, the different and probably original version of Luke 7:35).[22] Possibly Luke 11:49 wishes to present Christ as "the wisdom of God". Paul names Christ as "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24) whom God "made our wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:30; cf. 1:21). A later letter softens the claim a little: in Christ "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden" (Col 2:3). Beyond question, the clearest form of the equation "the divine wisdom=Christ" comes in 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:13. Yet, even there Paul's impulse is to explain "God's hidden wisdom" not so much as the person of Christ himself, but rather as God's "wise and hidden purpose from the very beginning to bring us to our destined glory" (1 Cor. 2:7). In other words, when Paul calls Christ "the wisdom of God", even more than in the case of other titles, God's eternal plan of salvation overshadows everything.

(adapted)



Christ Sophia Icon by Robert Lentz

CONCLUSION

We recognize that given creation's diversity in sexuality and gender, God has given us Jesus, Mary as well as other saints in whatever form we need. Let God come close to you in whatever way that fits for you.

"God is gay" we can say. "God is transgender" we can say. Essentially, as human beings evolve from postmodern pluralism to metamodern or post-postmodern styles of thinking, we can begin to locate aspects of our gender and sexual selves in the divine godhead more easily.

"To affirm that male and female equally bear the image of God is to say that God encompasses all gender and forms of sexuality.



Sophia Wisdom by Pamela Matthews

The language of Genesis is limited, and we must go beyond it to affirm that male, female, agender, genderfluid, genderqueer, intersex, gender non-conforming, transgender, and every other gender are all equals in bearing God's image."

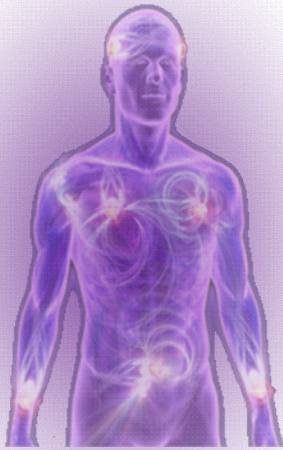
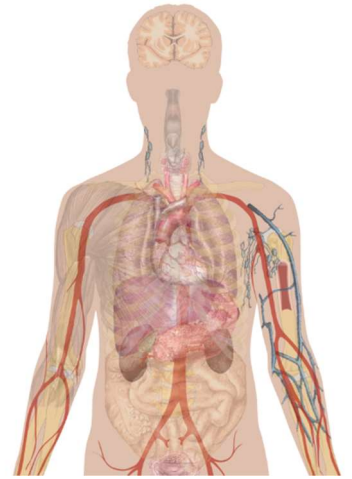
Adapted from Chuck Roberts — <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/hippieheretic/2017/08/the-nashville-statement-a-point-by-point-response.html>

Jesus' Three Bodies — and Ours

In this chapter on pages 168-170 I bring up the biblical idea, affirmed by other traditions and mystics, that we have different bodies for different forms of being. Paul says God provides different kinds of bodies for different beings (15: 38). There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies (15: 40) and physical bodies and spiritual bodies (15: 44). While I am not sure if Paul saw the differences as I see them, he did see differences. Here is how I see it:

Jesus had a physical body just like ours. It was divine like he was and like we are.

Physical body



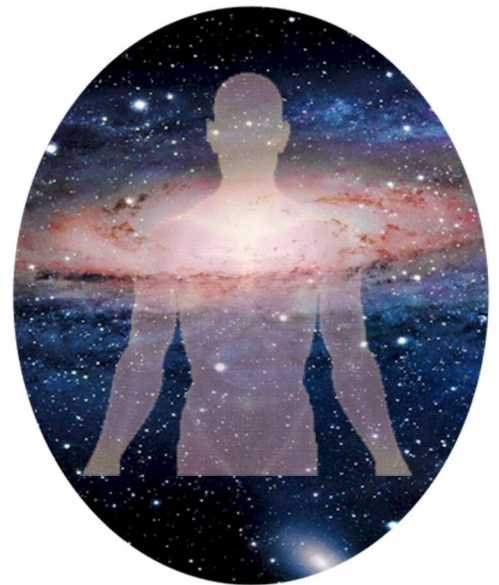
Energetic body

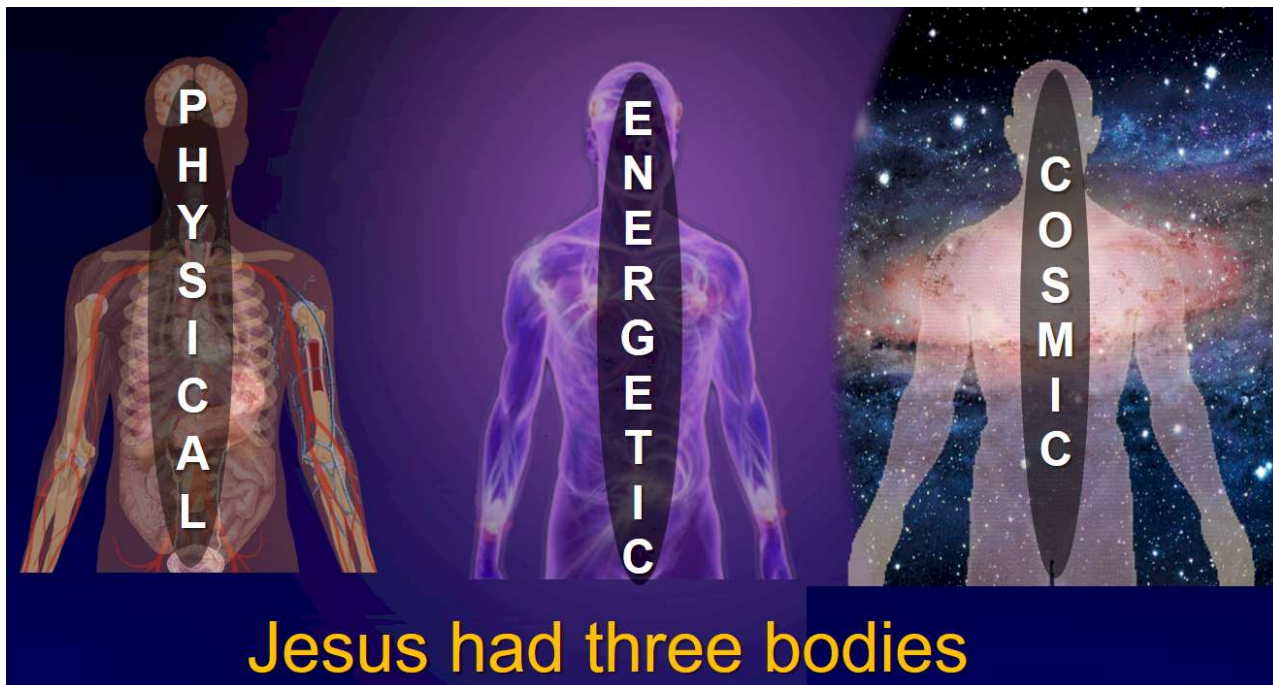
We, along with Jesus, all have an energetic body which is normally anchored to our physical body. This is the body we use when we dream and when we move into higher realms of consciousness. When we die, this energy body leaves our physical body behind.

Jesus' physical form changed after the resurrection. He is now in his energetic body, an energy field identifiable as him but no longer limited by space and time. This body, called a "spiritual body by Paul, is now beyond ordinary earthly physical limits such as gender. The Apostle Paul makes a compelling case in 1 Corinthians 15 for a spiritual body in life after death in contrast to a physical body.

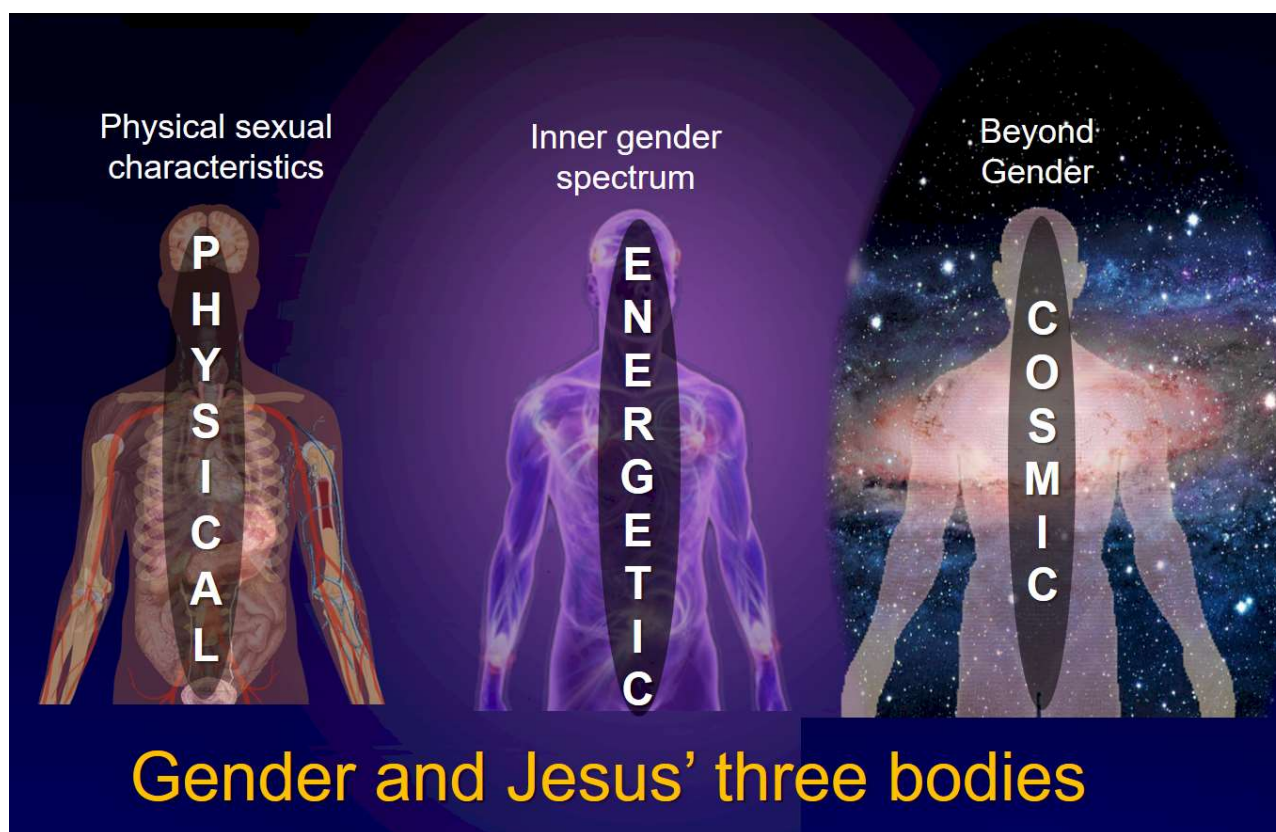
The temporary physical body will perish, and we will also be left with an immortal, nonphysical body (15: 53). Paul says the physical body of flesh and blood cannot be part of the non-physical realm (15: 50). Then there will be no more physical death for us at that point because we are no longer physical beings. We will no longer be troubled by sickness, disease, or death. We might call this body our cosmic body which is a part of the Great I AM that is the Face of God Beyond Us.

Cosmic Body





Paul speaks of earthy (physical) bodies, spiritual (energy) bodies, and heavenly (cosmic) bodies. Perhaps this might be one way of thinking about them.



In this chapter on God, Jesus, and Gender, here is one way to consider gender matters in each of these three bodies.

Heaven appears to transcend sexuality and gender as

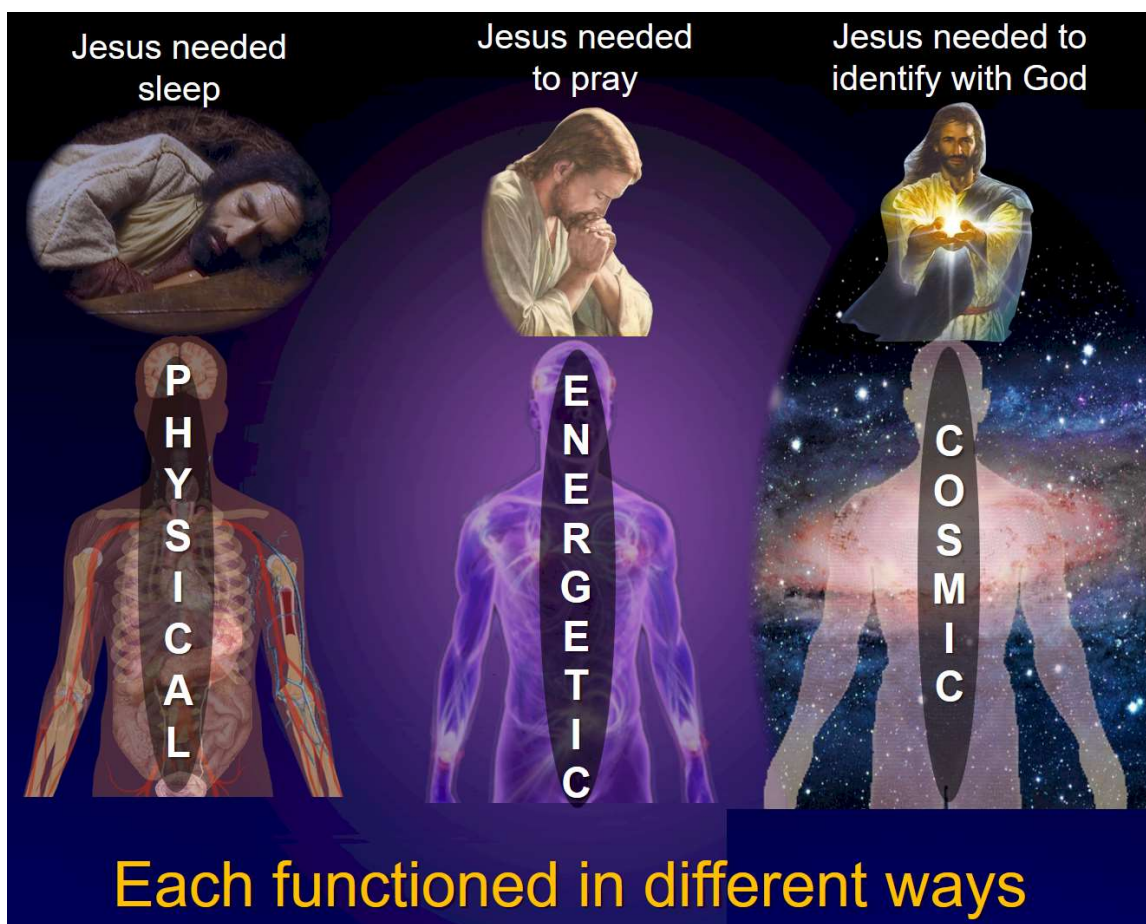
Jesus indicated there is no marriage in heaven. While Jesus was in his physical body, he was a man who acted in both masculine and feminine ways, serving others in his own time and culture. Jesus was the paradigm of full humanity even in his physically male form.



Eastern traditions sometimes call these the gross (physical) body, the subtle (energetic) body, and the causal (cosmic) or very subtle body.

Then they refer to gross, subtle, and causal states of consciousness.

I use the terms basic, awakened, and transcendent consciousness.





We, like Jesus, have three bodies

At home in the
physical world



At home in the
awakened spiritual world



At home in identifying with
God in the transcendent
world



Each body supports a different consciousness