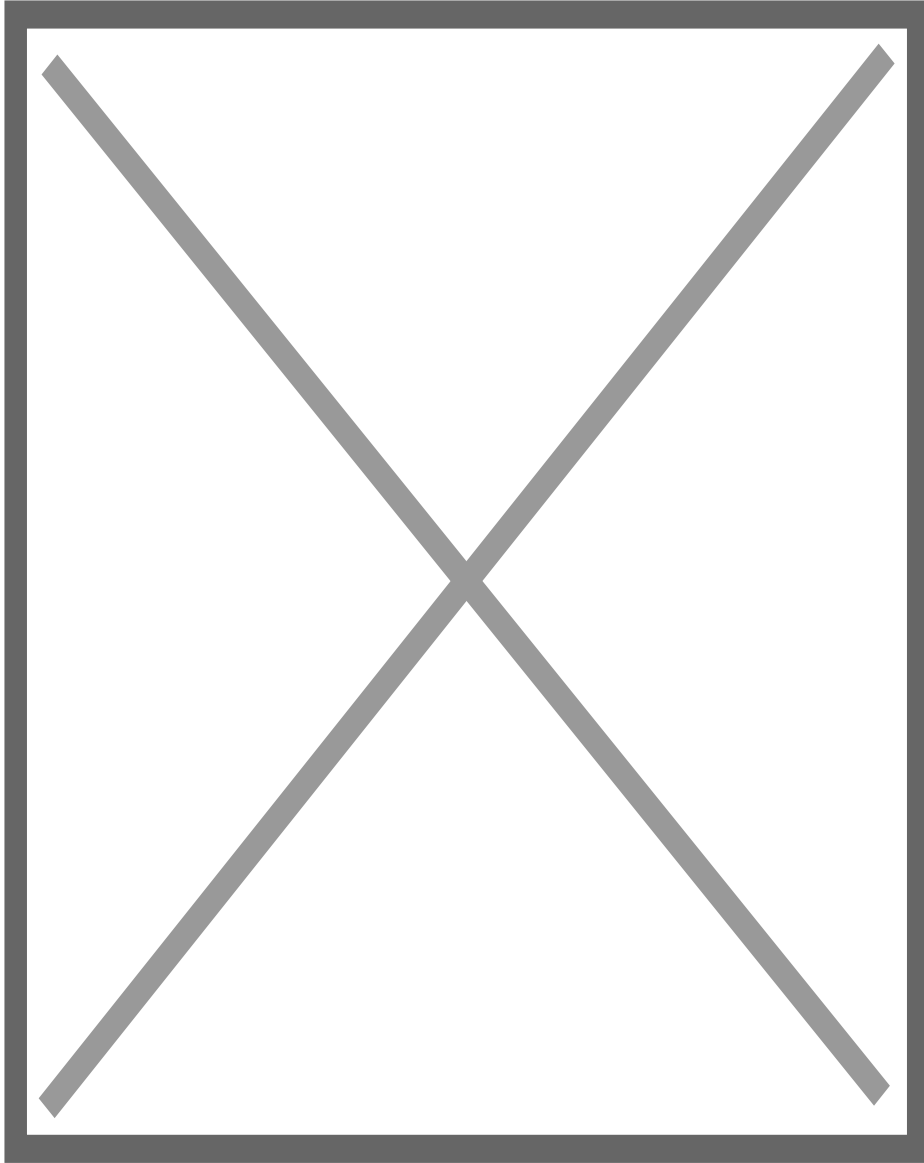


The genders within us

I am more and more convinced that trans people's gender multiplicity will point us to our collective liberation.

by [Brian Bantum](#) in the [April 2026](#) issue

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Century illustration

Sometimes I worry that I am too hard on us men. But then I watch another news story about a Trumpian power grab and the men that make it possible, or I watch footage of children being grabbed by masked ICE officers, and I can't help but wonder what has gone so wrong that we can believe this is what it means to have purpose. I keep coming back to the collective witness of and threat to trans people during this crisis. What if their way of

life points to our collective freedom?

I was talking last year with a trans woman I know, and I messed up her pronouns. “I’m so sorry!” I said. Her response has never really left me, and these days it feels even more significant.

She said, “You know, I feel like everyone has all the genders swirling around in them. I maybe feel them closer to the surface in my life. So however you see me, that is something that is true of me, and I want you to use pronouns that describe who you see. I am OK with that because what you see is a part of me.”

I know that every trans person’s experience is different and that many would not echo what my friend said. Still, her words have continued to shape my thinking—not only my understanding of trans experience but also my theology of gender. They have pressed me to consider what it means to describe myself and my experience as a man; they have opened me toward imagining a way that all of us, especially men, might be able to be a little more free. And if more men can feel truly free, maybe all our communities will be able to find wholeness a little less threatening.

As soon as she described the multiplicity of genders within her, I felt the fullness of God and God’s creation of us. “So God made humans in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). I could almost see a braid of God’s life slowly unwinding and being twisted into these new earthly creatures.

In a former life I might have imagined strands that correlated to male or to female being twisted together to constitute these two, distinct but connected creatures. But my friend is right. When I think of my life, my spouse, my children, my friends, the little kids I get to watch grow up—maybe there are some tendencies, but there are also so many variations and particularities. God takes those strands of her life and twists them into us in infinitely different ways. But in our desire for clarity or power or simply out of fear of the parts of ourselves that we don’t understand, we try to cut out what doesn’t fit, from ourselves and from others. How many little boys have we told to stop crying or just get up and keep going? How many times have we given them a bat instead of letting them carry around a doll (and what is a GI Joe figure but a doll anyway)?

I suspect men’s fear of themselves is part of what drives the current administration’s war on trans people. Adam ate of the fruit, his eyes were opened, and he realized he was naked. Shame doesn’t have to do with another person; it always has to do with what we feel or are not willing to see in ourselves. And we men have been covering ourselves in so much for so long, haven’t we?

I realize that many men may be sensitive to what feels like a constant critique of masculinity. But I wonder if we could begin to see what my friend’s life points to: that our freedom doesn’t come from narrowing the criteria of what it means to be a man or a woman. In my trans friend and in the community I have watched her cultivate around her, I have seen a freedom to embrace all the parts of herself, to gather all those strands that God has so beautifully woven into her and discover a fullness, what it means to be whole. And what rings true to me, what preaches to me, is that her wholeness does not require me to fit myself into a mold in order to be a part of her life. Perhaps more threatening, to be in relationship with her asks me to embrace all of who I am. Maybe that’s why trans people are so dangerous to a wannabe fascist state, to an idolatrous Christian nationalism.

For those of us wondering what resistance to the current regime must look like, I am more certain it is the multiplicity of trans people that points us to our collective freedom. Every day in the lives of our boys we have an opportunity to encourage their freedom, their wholeness. When we embrace the multiplicity, the many within ourselves, and we commit to cultivating communities where the many can be whole, the kingdom of God is there. We need the courage to do this the way our trans siblings do every day.