

## CURRENT THEOLOGY NOTE

### CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE HUMAN BODY

The subject of the human body has appeared recently in debates concerning both the beginning and the end of human life. In order to determine the question of the personhood of the unborn, ethicists ask when it is that a human embryo becomes a body that can be informed by a soul.<sup>1</sup> Despite disagreement about when the embryo actually does become a human body, all agree nowadays, just as medieval writers did, that the condition for ensoulment is the presence of a true human body.<sup>2</sup> Concerning the end of life, ethicists, having debated the respect due to dead human bodies,<sup>3</sup> now ask whether human beings enjoy proprietary rights over their body parts.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Bedate and Robert Cefalo, "The Zygote: To Be or Not to Be a Person," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 14 (1989) 641–45; Thomas Bole, "Metaphysical Accounts of the Zygote as a Person and the Veto Power of Facts," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 14 (1989) 647–53; Lisa Cahill, "Abortion, Autonomy, and Community," in Patricia Jung and Thomas Shannon, eds., *Abortion and Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 85–98; Lisa Cahill, "The Embryo and the Fetus," *TS* 54 (1993) 124–42; Diane Irving, "Scientific and Philosophical Expertise: An Evaluation of the Arguments on 'Personhood,'" *Linacre Quarterly* 60 (1993) 18–46; Clayton Kischer, "Human Development and Reconsideration of Ensoulment," *Linacre Quarterly* 60 (1993) 57–63; Richard McCormick, "Who or What is the Pre-embryo?" *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 1 (1991) 1–15; Maurizio Mori, "Genetic Selection and the Status of the Embryo," *Bioethics* 7 (1993) 141–48; Thomas Shannon and Allan Wolter, "Reflections on the Moral Status of the Pre-Embryo," *TS* 51 (1990) 603–26. See also the essays in Margaret Farley and Lisa Cahill, eds., *Embodiment, Medicine and Morality* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1994). On a related issue, see Mario Moussa and Thomas Shannon, "The Search for the New Pineal Gland: Brain Life and Personhood," *Hastings Center Report* 22 (1992) 30–37.

<sup>2</sup> Though Thomas Aquinas is key here, his "unity of the body and soul" is not completely immune from charges of dualism; see Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas's Concept of the Body and Out of Body Experiences," *Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993) 387–400.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Feinberg warned against the "trap of sentimentality"; see his "The Mistreatment of Dead Bodies," *Hastings Center Report* 15 (1985) 31–37. William F. May responded: "While living, a person identifies with his or her body in such a way as to render the dignity of the two inseparable. A person not only *has* a body, she *is* her body. . . . Yet while the body retains a recognizable form, even in death, it commands the respect of identity. No longer a human presence, it still reminds us of the presence that once was utterly inseparable from it" ("Religious Justifications for Donating Body Parts," *Hastings Center Report* 15 [1985] 38–42, at 39). See also Leon Kass, "Thinking about the Body," *Hastings Center Report* 15 (1985) 20–30; Gilbert Meilaender, "Terra es animata: On Having a Life," *Hastings Center Report* 23 (1993) 25–32.

<sup>4</sup> Lori Andrews, "My Body, My Property," *Hastings Center Report* 16 (1986) 28–38; Courtney Campbell, "Body, Self, and the Property Paradigm," *Hastings Center Report* 22 (1992) 34–43; John Harvey, "Paying Organ Donors," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 16 (1990) 117–19.

These debates indicate to some degree the accuracy of Robert Brungs's remark in the fiftieth-anniversary volume of this journal that "all the major issues agitating the Church today . . . revolve about the meaning of our bodiedness."<sup>5</sup> Referring to a diversity of issues from homosexuality and reproduction to celibacy and women's ordination, Brungs believes that the resources of our historical faith should assist us as we accept "both the opportunity and the need for a major doctrinal development 'on the body.'"<sup>6</sup> Though a doctrinal development on the body is still forthcoming,<sup>7</sup> scholars have turned to the Christian tradition to study the human body.<sup>8</sup> As the early church historian Gedaliahu Stroumsa remarks, "The body is fashionable."<sup>9</sup>

This note will provide a survey of that historical research in order to establish the foundation and background of the theological interest we Christians have in the human body. In particular, it will review those Christian sources in which more attention is given to the human body: the Scriptures, the early Church, and medieval and renaissance church histories. Turning to the Enlightenment, we will ask why that period also marks an abrupt turn away from the human body. The note will conclude with summary reflections pointing to practical insights that result from this historical survey.

### *Reflections on the Scriptures*

Despite a commonplace belief that Christianity has maintained a negative stance toward the human body,<sup>10</sup> a singular consensus among

<sup>5</sup> Robert Brungs, "Biology and the Future: A Doctrinal Agenda," *TS* 50 (1989) 698–717, at 700.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 701.

<sup>7</sup> For Pope John Paul II on the body, see Augustine Regan, "Human Body in Moral Theology: Some Basic Orientations," *Studia Moralia* 17 (1979) 151–87; Ronald Modras, "Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in *The Vatican and Homosexuality*, ed. Pat Furey and Jeannine Gramick (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 119–25.

<sup>8</sup> Our focus is on Christianity and the body. For recent Jewish literature, see Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York, 1992); Paul Morris, "The Embodied Text: Covenant and Torah," *Religion* 20 (1990) 77–87. For a bibliography of works on religion and body parts, see Lawrence Sullivan, "Body Works: Knowledge of the Body in the Study of Religion," *History of Religions* 30 (1990) 86–99. See also a collection of essays on the body and comparative spirituality in the July issue of *Religion* 19 (1989) 197–292.

<sup>9</sup> Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "*Caro salutis cardo*: Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought," *History of Religions* 30 (1990) 25–50, at 25.

<sup>10</sup> James Nelson, e.g., remarks that "for most of the Christian era we have mistrusted, feared, and discounted our bodies" (*Body Theology* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992] 9). And Michael Barnes asserts that "Christian asceticism has never felt entirely at home with the body, to which it has reacted with, at best, ambivalence and, at worst,

historians, scripture scholars, and theologians contradicts that assumption, asserting instead that the Christian tradition has always regarded the body as constitutive of human identity, and some strands of that tradition have vigorously combatted various expressions of dualism.<sup>11</sup> This insight into the tradition first entered contemporary thought from the scripture studies of Rudolf Bultmann.

Reflecting on the Greek word *soma* ("body"), Bultmann argues that for Paul "*soma* belongs inseparably, constitutively, to human existence. . . . The only human existence there is—even in the sphere of the Spirit—is somatic existence."<sup>12</sup> Emphasizing human existence as bodily, Bultmann notes that Paul never uses *soma* to describe a corpse. Moreover, the body is so integrated into human existence that, Bultmann claims, the human does not have a *soma*, but rather is *soma*.

Robert Jewett develops these insights. He begins his work with the remark that "for Paul theology is anthropology."<sup>13</sup> Investigating anthropological terms in the Pauline epistles, Jewett finds on the one hand that the word *sarx* ("flesh") generally describes those urges for our own personal righteousness that keep us from God. On the other hand, the word *soma* is used to combat gnostic individualism and provides the basis both for the metaphysical unity of the person and for the possibility of "relationship between persons."<sup>14</sup>

Recent scholars advance these arguments. While granting that the Greek *soma* conveys a "circumscribed totality" which serves as the basis of personal unity, Antoine Vergote notes that the Semitic notion of body is clear from organs, like the heart, kidneys, and lungs, that

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a positively destructive dualism" ("The Body in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola," *Religion* 19 [1989] 263–73, at 263). See the polemic in Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). Finally, notice the assumption of Scott Heller that being Catholic and Jesuit makes Le Moyne College an "unlikely setting" for courses on the body ("Philosopher Links Classical Texts and 'Vogue' Models in Study of Cultural Pressures on Women and Their Bodies," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 8 September 1993, A10, A16).

<sup>11</sup> This does not deny that many Christian teachers and pastors have viewed sexuality pessimistically; see Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code*, 550–1150 (Toronto: Toronto University, 1984); *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: Toronto University, 1993). Precisely because the Christian tradition holds the human body in such positive regard, those Christians who have so pessimistically sought to "overcome" or "dominate" sexuality are rightly accused of promoting a "heretical dualism" (Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* [Princeton: Princeton University, 1977] 162–232, at 165).

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1952) 1.192–203, at 192.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 458.

metaphorically represent “the ensemble of rapports” that we enjoy with the world and God. For the Semite, then, the human “is not an individualized entity but an ensemble of diversely qualified relations.” Still, both the Greek and Semitic traditions would hold, Vergote contends, that the human “is not someone who has a body but [someone] whose existence is corporal.” In this light, the scriptural understanding of “the resurrection event does not imply the thesis of an immortal soul; on the contrary, it suggests the idea that the body is the whole man.”<sup>15</sup> In short, the aim of resurrection is a human body which is able to explain human existence, personality, and relatedness. Through their corporeality, believers are related, and thus can be caught up in Christ, who transforms that corporeality. Wayne Meeks makes a similar point, quoting St. Paul: “Christ will be magnified *in my body*, either by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20).<sup>16</sup>

So Scriptures reveal not simply who we are in Christ, but who we will be. If our corporeality encompasses our existence and is the basis for our relationality, then the resurrection of our bodies means that we will never be at war within our bodies again.

Does that promise of glorious integration have any bearing on the moral task for a Christian? Patricia Jung pursues this question in a brilliant essay. Acknowledging that “the emotions can create a muscular storm” and inhibit moral action, she argues that character-based ethicists need to attend better to virtues that affect the whole person. To this end she proposes a “sanctification of bodily needs” that helps assimilate a vision of our bodies as transformable and seeks forms of moral action that foster our self-understanding as fully corporeal persons.<sup>17</sup>

Several recent biblical scholars take similar positions.<sup>18</sup> They interpret the promise of the resurrection of our bodies as a call to the moral task to treat our bodies as fully incorporated subjects. In sum, both scripture scholars and theologians point out that the unity and relationality of the body is both eschatological promise and moral task.

<sup>15</sup> Antoine Vergote, “The Body as Understood in Contemporary Thought and Biblical Categories,” *Philosophy Today* 35 (1991) 93–105, at 96–97. See also Bultmann, *Theology* 1.192.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven: Yale University) 134.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia B. Jung, “Sanctification: An Interpretation in Light of Embodiment,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11 (1983) 75–95, at 84.

<sup>18</sup> Normand Bonneau, “The Logic of Paul’s Argument on the Resurrection of the Body in 1 Cor 15:35–44a,” *Science et Esprit* 45 (1993) 79–92; E. Earle Ellis, “Soma in First Corinthians,” *Interpretation* 44 (1990) 132–44; Roman Garrison, “Paul’s Use of the Athlete Metaphor in 1 Cor. 9,” *Studies in Religion* 22 (1993) 209–18; T. Francis Glasson, “2 Corinthians 5:1–10 versus Platonism,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990) 145–56.

Another scripture scholar, Jerome Neyrey, looks at Paul's anthropology in a different way. From Mary Douglas's model of the correlation between the physical human body and the body of society,<sup>19</sup> Neyrey finds in the corporeal language of First Corinthians, the self-understanding of the Corinthian Church in terms of the body of Christ. After examining its different members, Neyrey concludes that "the body of Christ . . . is a structured and differentiated body."<sup>20</sup> Neyrey develops Jewett's thesis that Paul's theology is anthropological, adding that his ecclesiology is anthropological as well.

In reading the Gospel of Mark, Neyrey again uses Douglas's thesis and engages the more visceral dimensions of the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> According to Douglas, purity laws not only protect the physical body but also provide norms for members within a particular social body. Thus purity laws set both hygienic and social boundaries. Neyrey finds that Jesus reformed the purity laws through his own practices and thus provided a new hermeneutics for determining membership in the community. Similarly, Majella Franzmann<sup>22</sup> sees in the eating practices of Jesus another way of understanding how Jesus set normative standards for the believing community. The invitation to approach the table and eat the body of Christ is rooted in Jesus' own eating practices.

Thus, the human body revealed in the body of Christ emerges as central not only for the self-understanding of the individual Christian, but also for the entire believing community. As the basis for personal and social integration, the human body finds in the body of Christ the call to human fulfillment and the expression of that fulfillment.

### *Early Church History*

Human fulfillment as embodied in the risen Christ is central for understanding the hopes and moral responsibilities characteristic of early Christians. Brian Daley captures the importance of the early Church's hope of resurrection and immortality in establishing the Christian task to seek integration.<sup>23</sup> Of the Apologists of the second

<sup>19</sup> See especially Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> Jerome Neyrey, "Body Language in 1 Corinthians," *Semeia* 35 (1986) 129–70, at 158.

<sup>21</sup> Jerome Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," *Semeia* 35 (1986) 91–128.

<sup>22</sup> Majella Franzmann, "Of Food, Bodies, and the Boundless Reign of God in the Synoptic Gospels," *Pacifica* 5 (1992) 17–31.

<sup>23</sup> Even Origen, whose writings do not seem sufficiently to regard the human body, recognizes the importance of integration; see Mark Edwards, "Origen No Gnostic; Or, on

century, Daley writes that they "saw the integrated mortality of body and spirit as an anthropological necessity: only the immortality of the whole person can make our present struggle to integrate the body and spirit meaningful."<sup>24</sup> Like the scripture scholars, Daley finds in human destiny as defined in the risen Christ the opportunity and the demand for all people to find in their own bodies the fullness of the Spirit of Christ.

In his study of the early Church, Stroumsa claims that integrating the divinity and humanity of Christ was the major theological task and accomplishment of the early Church: "The unity of Christ, possessor of two natures but remaining nonetheless one single persona, is, of course, in a nutshell, the main achievement of centuries of Christological and trinitarian pugnacious investigations."<sup>25</sup> This achievement became practically significant in the ascetical imitation of Christ through which Christians sought a unified self like Christ's: as Christ brought divinity and humanity into one, Christians were called to bring body and soul together. Integration became a key task for all early Christians, to "be an entity of body and soul, a Christ-bearing exemplar."<sup>26</sup>

Integration of body and soul was not an aim for the contemporaries of the early Christians. Stroumsa and others point out that in Greek thought the self was distinct from the body.<sup>27</sup> For Plato, "to know oneself—the reflexive attitude par excellence—meant to attend to one's soul, to the exclusion of the body."<sup>28</sup> Thus when Christianity, on the belief that the human is in God's image, made integrating the body and soul both a theological expression of humanity's integrity and a normative task, it proposed to the Western world a new claim on the human body. "The discovery of the person as a unified composite of soul and body in late antiquity was indeed a Christian discovery."<sup>29</sup>

This unified composite has rarely been considered foundational to the Christian understanding of human sexuality. Yet Peter Brown claims that "the doctrine of sexuality as a privileged symptom of personal transformation was the most consequential rendering ever

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the Corporeality of Man," *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992) 23–37; Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1992) 85–86.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Daley, "The Ripening of Salvation," *Communio* 17 (1990) 27–49, at 32; *The Hope of the Early Church* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Stroumsa, "Caro salutis cardo" 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 39–40.

<sup>27</sup> See Meeks, *The Origins* 130–31; Vergote, "The Body" 95.

<sup>28</sup> Stroumsa, "Caro salutis cardo" 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 44.

achieved of the ancient and Christian yearning for a single heart."<sup>30</sup> He investigates how Christian doctrine freed citizens from Roman control over their bodies. That control exercised itself in two ways: the human body of the nobility upheld the dignity of the state through the citizen's own noble bearing, and the human body reproduced so as to give the state control over the chain of generative life. Thus, the Roman state was assured both of its pride and of the children it needed and, in return, gave to the citizens freedom to do whatever they would with their bodies so long as they did it with proper discipline. In this exchange, the state vested the human body with a dignity derived from the state's needs and not from the body's own integrity. Christians and Jews resisted this licentious exchange and charged that the city bestowed a false indeterminacy on the human body which, in their eyes, was created in God's image. Recouping that determinacy meant rejecting many sexual liberties, but in doing so, the Church liberated the human body from the city's control. Brown writes:

Christian attitudes to sexuality delivered the death-blow to the ancient notion of the city as the arbiter of the body. Christian preachers endowed the body with intrinsic, inalienable qualities. It was no longer a neutral indeterminate outcrop of the natural world, whose use and very right to exist was subject to predominantly civic considerations of status and utility.<sup>31</sup>

Particularly noteworthy is Brown's assertion that chastity played a decisive role in liberating women from the claims of the city. Women benefactresses as widows or virgins freed themselves from the city's claims on them to reproduce and became instead models of generosity in the life of the Church.<sup>32</sup> Thus Ambrose proposes the paradox of the closed womb: it is a sign of the benefactress's openness to the Scriptures, Christ, and the poor.<sup>33</sup>

Joyce Salisbury, however, is less enthusiastic about the closed womb; for her, it was not a sign of freedom, but another exercise of control. As a woman was to absent herself from all sexual activity, likewise she was to remove herself from all other worldly commerce. In particular, for the true virgin and good Christian woman, the silent mouth became a necessary corollary to the chaste womb. Thus the Christian community raised her to a privileged position on account of

<sup>30</sup> Peter Brown, "Late Antiquity," in Paul Veyne, ed., *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1987) 235–311, at 300.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 1988) 437.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Body and Society*, 259–84; 341–86.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 363.

her chastity, but the same community paradoxically silenced her in return for the privilege.<sup>34</sup>

Scholars of the early Church demonstrate, then, that religion and the state wrestled through a kind of dialectic for the social construction of the body. The struggle between the two appears most striking in those arenas where Christians were martyred. As Francine Cardman notes, their deaths are “the most intimate of bodily choices.”<sup>35</sup> Surprising though it may seem, the shock of early Christian martyrdom did not come from the brutality of the spectacles; athletic events and, in particular, gladiatorial combat conditioned Roman audiences to slaughter. Rather, the introduction of women into the arena stunned both Romans and Christians. The claims on women’s bodies again became the focal point of the struggle between the two. In fact, during their torments, women became victims of sexual abuse; their chastity, praised by the Christian community, became the target that their persecutors most sought. Too much weighed upon the persecutors’ attempts to wrestle that chastity from these women martyrs. As Cardman remarks, “The dissolution of the social body is mirrored in the destruction of the martyrs’ own bodies.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, while the state made these women’s bodies objects of attack and derision, the Church depicted them as gloriously triumphant.

The beauty of martyrs’ bodies becomes a commonplace in Christian hagiography. David Morris notes that, among all martyrs’ bodies, Sebastian’s emerges as a paradigm. Unlike other forms of martyrdom, his left the integrity of his body intact and, so, pain and beauty could be captured at once in his body. Morris describes the depictions of Sebastian as a “visionary pain” that “employs the body in order to free us from the body.”<sup>37</sup> Morris’s interpretation of the experience of being freed from the body is, however, more Platonist than Christian. He misses what the historians, theologians, and scripture scholars continuously stress. As Cardman reminds us, in martyrdom the Christian finds freedom, not from the body, but from death; the martyr’s body triumphs. Like Salisbury, however, Cardman has reservations about the cost of this victory: “For women especially, the making of a martyr meant the unmaking of the body—her own as well as her world’s.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Not all virgins, however, remained silent; see Joyce Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> Francine Cardman, “Acts of the Women Martyrs,” *Anglican Theological Review* 70 (1989) 144–50, at 147.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>37</sup> David Morris, *The Culture of Pain* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991) 135.

<sup>38</sup> Cardman, “Acts of the Women Martyrs” 150.



*Medieval and Renaissance History*

Though early church history demonstrates convincingly the Church's pursuit of the unity of humanity found in the unity of Christ, a significant amount of that research focuses on the claims made on women's bodies. The same can be said of medieval and renaissance scholarship. Moreover, these scholars argue that any depiction of the woman's body is dependent upon the claim being made on it.

Margaret Miles, for instance, in her work on female nakedness demonstrates how much iconography depends on its interpreters. Ambrose and Augustine, for instance, find in the nudity of Eve weakness and dependency, but Hildegard of Bingen sees Eve's body as life-giving, while the married Martin Luther calls Eve's body beautiful. Miles has two tasks: to free naked women's bodies from the interpretative context that makes them objectifications of sin, and to allow medieval women whose voices were not heard in the academy to express today their understanding of women's bodies.<sup>39</sup>

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, similarly, reexamines the iconography of midwives at caesarian births. In her study of illuminations, she discovers a shift from those where "saints and the Virgin use the Caesarian operation to bring salvation to suffering women" to those where "devils in various forms are responsible for the Caesarian delivery of the Antichrist."<sup>40</sup> She finds the iconographic conversion due to two major interests: the attempt by physicians to claim obstetrics from midwives, and the simultaneous effort of clerics to remove midwives from the practice of baptizing in these emergencies. These two groups of men wrestle away from the midwives their profession, and along the way they demonstrate how the women's body can move from subject of life to object of damnation.<sup>41</sup>

These attempts to reclaim the woman's body as a subject and to free her from any objectification achieve impressive results in the writings of Caroline Bynum. Interestingly, in an essay responding to the art historian Leo Steinberg, Bynum connects the feminists' attempts to reclaim the woman's body with the Christian urge to overcome dualism. In his masterpiece, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and*

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989); see also her *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979).

<sup>40</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarian Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Cultures* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990) 5.

<sup>41</sup> On a less theological note, but on woman's body as pliant object, see Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought and Packaged* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985).

in *Modern Oblivion*, Steinberg presents an extraordinary finding: while looking at Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Magi* in the Florentine Uffizi Gallery, Steinberg notices what the wise men came to see, the genitals of the infant Jesus. The truth of the Epiphany is revealed in Jesus' organs of reproduction. Throughout Renaissance art, Steinberg finds again and again a display of the genitals of Jesus in paintings of Madonna and Child, the Adoration of the Magi, the Deposition from the Cross, among others. Through these organs, Renaissance painting conveys the humanity of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

Bynum responds that prior to Renaissance paintings late medieval depictions often display a lactating body of Christ, a body that itself provides nourishment.<sup>43</sup> But Bynum does not make a gender claim here. She argues that these depictions, usually originating from women, are not meant to highlight the body of Christ as gendered, but rather as fully human: "Humanity is genderless. To medieval women humanity was, most basically, not femaleness, but physicality, the flesh of the 'Word made flesh.'"<sup>44</sup> Thus the lactating Jesus is not the "feminine" side of Christ, but a necessary component of the humanity of Christ. If the "Word" does not lactate, then no human does.

In retrieving late medieval women's bodies as subjects, Bynum leads us back to the claim that through the body of Christ Christians found the prototype for full personal integration and the grounds for the full inclusion of all humanity. In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, she clearly states her intention to present "a complex refutation of the standard interpretation of asceticism as world-rejection or as practical dualism."<sup>45</sup> She denies that women treated their bodies as objects to be controlled. On the contrary, they understood themselves as bodies: they were bodies, just as Christ was flesh. Separated from the access that priests had to the table of the Lord, women encountered in their flesh the body of Christ that was so hard to receive from their male counterparts. In their bodies, through fasting, ascetical practices, stigmata, mystical visions and even mystical unions, women experienced

<sup>42</sup> Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). John O'Malley, S.J., provides a supporting theological postscript, 199–203.

<sup>43</sup> Caroline Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," in *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) 79–117.

<sup>44</sup> Caroline Bynum, "'... And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption* 151–79, at 179.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987) 6.

the suffering and redeeming body of Christ. Full integration was found precisely in and through the body.

In her recent essays Bynum builds further upon her premise that "in some way the body is the self."<sup>46</sup> Old and new ground is covered here. She returns to the ascetical practices of women where "bodiliness provides access to the sacred."<sup>47</sup> She describes anew the profound concern of many early and medieval Christians about the reassemblage of our body parts after death. But her interests remain the same. Denying neither "the centrality of religion to the social construction of the body"<sup>48</sup> nor a vicious expression of that construction, misogyny,<sup>49</sup> Bynum depicts women as understanding themselves as subjects able to construct through their bodies a world in which they are at one with their bodies, themselves and with all humanity. This self-understanding is mediated through their understanding of the body of Christ.

### *The Enlightenment*

Historical research after the Renaissance shows a dramatic departure from any consideration of the human body as subject. On the contrary, if today we consider the human body as something to be understood instead of someone to be encountered, that change was made, it seems, by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Barbara Stafford, for instance, argues that the habit of considering the body as an object resulted from the Enlightenment's attempt to achieve universal expressions of truth free from the liabilities of appearances.<sup>50</sup> For that purpose, eighteenth-century thinkers sought to subdue the visible for the sake of the invisible; an anthropology subsequently developed in which the mind dominated the body and the dualistic insight of Plato was again accepted.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Caroline Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body," in *Fragmentation and Redemption* 239–97, at 249.

<sup>47</sup> Caroline Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption* 181–238, at 186.

<sup>48</sup> Martha Reineke, "This Is My Body: Reflections on Abjection, Anorexia, and Medieval Women Mystics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58 (1990) 245–65, at 245.

<sup>49</sup> C. Bynum, "'... And Woman His Humanity'" 151.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991); Richard Devettere, "The Human Body as Philosophical Paradigm in Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty," *Philosophy Today* 10 (1976) 317–26.

<sup>51</sup> Against the claims of the Enlightenment, Mark Johnson argues that "any adequate

In their arguments, however, scholars like Stafford present the writings of physicians, rather than philosophers; in medicine, the Enlightenment seems to have had its greatest impact in objectifying the human body.<sup>52</sup> S. Kay Toombs captures this effect well:

Medicine has, for the most part, adopted a "Cartesian" paradigm of embodiment (i.e., a dualistic notion that separates mind and body and which conceptualizes the physical body in purely mechanistic terms). The physical machine-like body is assumed to be extrinsic to the essential self. This paradigm has been successful in many ways. The body-as-machine is susceptible to mechanical interventions.<sup>53</sup>

One particular effect of this objectification is the materialization of gender. Thomas Laquer argues that prior to the Enlightenment, medicine seems to have assumed a "one-sex" model, that is, that men and women shared fundamentally the same body and even the same genitals: men's were outside, women's inside. Notwithstanding issues of menstruation and pregnancy, it is not until 1800 that two fundamentally different genders are conceived.<sup>54</sup>

Feminists, too, see in the Enlightenment an objectification of the body. They add that those who controlled both the academy and medical institutions were able to speak on behalf of their male body, but the female body had no discernible voice.<sup>55</sup> The result, they argue, has been a specific objectification of the woman's body in which women have suffered major inequities.<sup>56</sup> To demonstrate that dichotomy, Barbara Duden, in a startling work, takes the exacting notes of a physician who practiced two centuries ago in a small German locality and

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account of meaning and rationality must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world" (*The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* [Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1988] xiii). Johnson's aim is simply to "put the body back into the mind" (xiv).

<sup>52</sup> Richard Zaner, *The Context of Self: A Phenomenological Inquiry Using Medicine as a Clue* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1981).

<sup>53</sup> S. Kay Toombs, "Illness and the Paradigm of Lived Body," *Theoretical Medicine* 9 (1988) 201–26, at 201.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Laquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> See Iris Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> Charlotte Muller, *Health Care and Gender* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990). Also Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, "Gender Disparities in Clinical Decision Making," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 266 (1991) 559–68; Nancy Jecker, "Social Ramifications of the Two-Sex View," *Medical Humanities Review* 6 (1992) 36–39.

tries to reconstruct from them the voices of the women who were his patients.<sup>57</sup>

The most celebrated work to narrate medicine's objectification of the human body is Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body*. Martin writes:

Many elements of modern medical science have been held to contribute to a fragmentation of the unity of the person. When science treats the person as a machine and assumes the body can be fixed by mechanical manipulations, it ignores, and it encourages us to ignore, other aspects of our selves, such as our emotions and our relations with other people.<sup>58</sup>

To demonstrate her argument, she studies the experience of women giving birth and details how the technology of obstetrics mechanizes the human body. In her study of alienation, Martin describes the woman-in-labor not as a person, a woman, a new mother, but as a birthing-device, a machine. Her illustrations tangibly convince the reader of the practical harm caused by the habitual willingness to understand and treat the human body as an object.

#### *Practical Insights*

We can recapitulate now the insights from these mainly historical investigations, while at the same time acknowledging their practical significance. First, the retrieval of the human body shows that just as Christians labored to understand the unity of Christ as fully human and fully divine, no less have they attempted to understand themselves as fully one in body and soul and in the body of Christ. That is, the challenge of Christian revelation in Christ incarnate is to overcome dualism, fragmentation, and division both in our anthropology and in our ecclesiology.

Second, the human body retrieved from the Scriptures and from the practices and theologies of the early, medieval, and renaissance Church is never an object, but always a person, a subject. If the body were an object, then we could say, with Plato, that our body is something that does not really pertain to us. The integral unity of the body of Christ, both anthropologically and ecclesiologically speaking, contradicts Plato's view. The task of the Christian tradition, then, is to direct us away from the tendency to isolate and objectify the body.<sup>59</sup> Walter Kasper reminds us of this task:

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon, 1987) 19–20.

<sup>59</sup> See Meredith McGuire, "Religion and the Body," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (1990) 283–96.

The body is God's creation and it always describes the whole of the human and not just a part. But this whole person is not conceived as a figure enclosed in itself, as in classical Greece, nor as a fleshy substance, as in materialism, nor as a person and personality, as in idealism. The body is the whole human in relationship to God and humanity. It is [the] human's place of meeting with God and humanity. The body is the possibility and the reality of communication.<sup>60</sup>

To Kasper's theological comment, the historians add the experience of our forebears who found in their bodies and in the body of Christ an ineluctable call as subjects to understand the meaning of "full incorporation."

Third, in order to be subject, the human body needs its own voice. Thus Miles and Blumenfeld-Kosinski restore the voices of those who have been objectified in the icons, and Duden and Bynum reconstruct from reports and observations the narratives that women's bodies express.

Not surprisingly the literature that most frequently addresses the need to give voice to the human body concerns pain. Meredith McGuire reminds us that pain unites the body and mind.<sup>61</sup> Ironically, despite this connection, the body in pain is often unable to express itself. Paul Brand captures this phenomenon by considering chronic pain and its power to prevent the body from speaking.<sup>62</sup> Brand offers some resolution by highlighting the empathetic quality of pain and by demonstrating that the witness to one in pain can sometimes communicate and articulate the depth of the suffering. For the same reason Barbara Bozak turns to the *Psalms* as a way of enabling the voice of the body to begin articulating the degree of its pain.<sup>63</sup> In *At the Will of the Body*, Arthur Frank urges readers to become aware of the narrative of pain within their own bodies and so enables readers to give voice to their own pain.<sup>64</sup>

The cause of pain is not always found within the body. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry examines the structure of torture. She cogently argues that torturers derive their power from the voices of the tortured. The primary aim of the torturer is not to exact a confession or to

<sup>60</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist, 1976) 150. See also Karl Rahner, "The Resurrection of the Body," in *Theological Investigations* 2, trans. K. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963) 203–16; "The Body in the Order of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations* 17, trans. M. Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 71–89.

<sup>61</sup> McGuire, "Religion and the Body," 287–89.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Brand, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 226–91.

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Bozak, "Suffering and the Psalms of Lament," *Église et Théologie* 23 (1992) 325–38.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur Frank, *At the Will of the Body* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992).

learn information, but rather to make the tortured person cry out, not only in pain but also in submission to the torturer. The torturer wants the tortured person to capitulate through self-accusation and blame. Thus the object of torture is to cause so much pain that the body is unable to keep the voice from submitting to the fictive power of the torturer. The aim is to tear the voice from its body: "The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it." The tortured body is left voiceless, once it acknowledges the torturer's "authority."<sup>65</sup>

Scarry notes that the tortured person's most difficult wound to heal is the voice. To this end, Amnesty International assists the tortured, unable out of shame to tell their narratives, to read and understand their records so that they may articulate one day the truth of the atrocities. Scarry's work convincingly demonstrates the centrality of the human voice in attaining the integration that Stroumsa and Daley highlight. Together with the other writers she highlights that silencing and other forms of exclusion are physically and personally destructive acts, but that the body as subject finds its expression in the verbalized narrative.

Fourth, in an oppressive world medieval women understood themselves as subjects precisely because they saw the Eucharist, not as *something* holy, but as *someone* who loves. In like manner, theologians today argue that the body of Christ in the Eucharist ought to be not an object of worship, but a subject encountered.<sup>66</sup> Echoing concerns of both Franzmann and Bynum, Mary Collins warns against reductive understandings that objectify the Eucharist and leave us unable to hear Christ's call to ministry.<sup>67</sup> When our understanding of the body of Christ is so narrow and "objective," our relationship with the Redeemer becomes marginally personal. Thus, a theology of the body calls us to encounter the Eucharist once again as the living body of Christ.

Fifth, as Steinberg implies and as Bynum makes clear, the gender-specific depictions of Jesus do not accentuate his body's gender but rather demonstrate the full integration of the body of Christ. This

<sup>65</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University, 1985) 27–59, at 49.

<sup>66</sup> William Crockett claims that Catholicism has tended to objectify the Body of Christ onto the altar (*Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* [New York: Pueblo, 1989] 232–34); see Peter Fink, "Eucharist, Theology of," in the *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville: Glazier/Liturgical, 1990) 431–47.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Collins, "Eucharist and Christology Revisited: The Body of Christ," *Theology Digest* 39 (1993) 321–32.

insight seems to be missed both by those who decry the emasculation of God the Father<sup>68</sup> and those who insist on Jesus' gender as grounds for excluding women from the priesthood.<sup>69</sup> Michael Novak, for example, writes: "Why is the priest male? It figures. It fits. The priest's maleness is a reminder of the role played in our salvation by the sacramentality of human flesh—not flesh-in-general, but male flesh."<sup>70</sup> Novak's remarks clearly oppose those for whom the body of Christ reveals a fuller understanding of God and a more inclusive understanding of humanity in God's image.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, by inferring that the Incarnation specifically occurs in male flesh, Novak goes against almost every strand of the tradition that theologians, scripture scholars, and church historians cling to.

Finally, our tradition is extraordinarily physical.<sup>72</sup> While sharing with other traditions belief in God as Creator and in the goodness of the created world, Christianity distinguishes itself by the extraordinary confession of the Incarnation. Likewise, its central liturgy revolves around eating the body and drinking the blood of its Savior, it defines its Church as the Body of Christ, and its longstanding hope is in the resurrection of the body. Not surprisingly, then, its most heated moral arguments are singularly about gender, sexuality, and reproduction, and not about justice or fidelity.

While many others would call these "private matters," our tradition is too visceral to make such a claim. Nonetheless, recent studies about the human body have prompted theologians to rethink our sexual ethics in terms of the relationship between the body of Christ and the human body. They recognize in the integrity of Christ's own unity a call to overcome fragmentation, to affirm the body as subject, and to work to end strife within our members. James Nelson, in particular, develops an incarnational theology that combats the dualism which treats the body as object in medicine, which compartmentalizes repro-

<sup>68</sup> See Mary and Leon Podles, "The Emasculation of God," *America* 161 (1989) 372–74.

<sup>69</sup> Benedict Ashley, "Gender and the Priesthood of Christ," *The Thomist* 57 (1993) 343–80.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Novak, "Women, Ordination and Angels," *First Things* 32 (April 1993) 25–32.

<sup>71</sup> See especially Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See also Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 97–124; and Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> See Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutilation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, trans. Tania Croft-Murray and Helen Elsom (New York: Cambridge University, 1988).



ductive organs in sexual ethics, and which imposes on the male a gender identity in which the mind dominates the emotions.<sup>73</sup>

Yet Nelson, like others, recognizes that a turn to the human body does not constitute primarily a turn to sexuality or reproduction. Rather, for any Christian, a turn to human flesh is always an encounter with the Incarnation. Stroumsa reminds us of the need to recognize in the tradition "the paramount importance devoted to the body of the Savior."<sup>74</sup> The turn to the body, then, whether in anthropological or ecclesiological contexts, always prompts a Christological interpretation. The turn to the body always involves, for the Christian, a summons to attain fuller incorporation. Our aim in this note about the turn to the human body has been to listen to voices, some long familiar and some quite fresh, which make that summons known.

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<sup>73</sup> See James Nelson, *Body Theology* (n. 10 above), which builds on Nelson's earlier work, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979). From a Catholic perspective, see Gareth Moore, *The Body in Context: Sex and Catholicism* (London: SCM, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> Stroumsa, "Caro salutis cardo" 35.