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## Human Embodiment and Christian Worship: God's Revelation Through the Human Body in Scripture, Theology, and Liturgy

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**Human Embodiment and Christian Worship:**  
**God's Revelation Through the Human Body in Scripture, Theology, and Liturgy**

A thesis presented for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Theology at Whitworth University

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B.S. Moody Bible Institute  
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## **Summary of Salient Points**

This research will demonstrate that bodily existence is essential to human nature and that Christian worship practices must go hand-in-hand with a sound understanding of human embodiment in order to be faithful to the essence of Christianity. The following thesis demonstrates that the biblical understanding is that humanity was created as a body enlivened by the breath of God and intended to be the sacred sanctuary where God's presence will dwell. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God's goal to make humanity the sanctuary for his presence is fulfilled. Jesus Christ is the image of God, who redeems and represents all humanity regardless of age, class, race, or gender. All humanity finds their ultimate destiny in union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, by which those who believe are transformed into God's dwelling place. The human body is where God is most directly present in creation, and thus must be accounted for in all reflections on worship and the Christian life. Ritual practices are proven to form human beliefs and behaviors in critical ways, requiring that liturgical rituals be carefully formed to faithfully shape Christians into God's sanctuary. All ethnicities, classes, and genders are invited into the Church, and the liturgy must especially recognize the gendered experience that all people have of God, necessitating the representation of both women and men as leaders within the Church. Sacred architecture must be structured and organized to nurture and orient people towards an embodied engagement with God. If the sanctuary God is building in the Church is to be truly faithful, the essentially embodied existence of humanity must be unequivocally affirmed and guide Christian doctrinal, liturgical, and spiritual practices.

## **Statement of Integrity**

I have composed this thesis and carried out the research which it represents. This thesis has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

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Carter Stepper

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## Introduction

*“O LORD, our Sovereign,*

*how majestic is your name in all the earth?*

*...what are human beings that you are mindful of them,*

*mortals that you care for them?”*

Psalm 8:1, 4 poses a serious and rather difficult question: What is humanity? What implications will our answer have for our beliefs, our actions, our ideals, and goals? In contemporary spirituality, even or perhaps especially amongst Christians, lurks a dangerous misunderstanding about the composition of the human person. This misunderstanding is that humanity is essentially a spiritual being whose bodily existence will be transcended at death. It is the belief that the human body is a non-essential or secondary attribute of human life, and that it can, truly or theoretically, be discarded or disregarded in comparison to other components of human existence. Examples for this kind of thought abound throughout both spiritual and secular mediums: “Do what you want with my body,” sings Lady Gaga,<sup>1</sup> because her mind will remain hers. Some trans-humanist thinkers posit that human consciousness can be preserved technologically even as the body dies and that this will be an improvement over being biologically constrained.<sup>2</sup> “My mind can make a heaven of hell, or a hell of heaven,” Satan proclaims in John Milton’s *Paradise*

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<sup>1</sup> Gaga, Lady. *Artpop*. Record Plant Studios, Track 7, October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> <https://whatistranshumanism.org/#what-is-uploading>

*Lost*,<sup>3</sup> asserting that the power of the mind is transcendent over something as fleeting as the body or its spatial condition. Others would claim that their loved ones are “gone” when they suffer from dementia or believe that the human body is simply a temporary vessel for some non-physical entity that is the true “us,” whether a soul, spirit, or the mind.

Christians, too, are affected by this kind of thinking. They often fall in two categories when evaluating their experience of worship, either desiring a strong emotional response to a church service, or they will claim that as long as they hear the sermon, none of the other parts of a service matters, centering the faith on their cognitive and mental understanding. Many Christian leaders will quote approvingly that “You don’t have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body,” misattributed to C.S. Lewis, fortunately so, lest it tarnishes his otherwise impeccable orthodox credentials.<sup>4</sup> Even inclusion in the Church, the body of Christ, is reduced to an “experience” of faith, an awakening, or some moment of verbal confession. These beliefs about humanity all have their roots deep in history and are related to some form or other of neoplatonism, gnosticism, or modern and post-modern spiritualist beliefs.

To say that most people have an inadequate view of human embodiment is not to claim that people think the body unimportant. However, the use which many or most people make of their bodies indicates that they do not appropriately value the human body, or, that their practice is inconsistent with any stated view they hold of the body. The belief

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<sup>3</sup> Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Penguin Classics, New York, NY: 2003. Book I, Lines 264-265.

<sup>4</sup> The earliest use of this phrase seems to be George Macdonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood*. Bernhard Tauchnitz, Leipzig, DE: 1867. Pg. 186. It is referenced positively in a Quaker periodical that ties it more directly to an explicitly spiritualist understanding of humanity: “Be Not Entangled Again Into the Yoke of Bondage,” *The British Friend: A Monthly Journal*. May, 1892. Pg. 157.

that the disembodied soul goes to heaven for eternity after death still has staying power in the Church. Choices about what worship practices to use and how sacred space ought to be organized are often nominalistic and pragmatic.

Any given view of the body will have a significant impact on our understanding of what it means to be human and by extension, what the flourishing of human life, both individual and corporate, will look like. If the human body is non-essential to human existence, then we will respond differently to the problems and concerns of the world than if we acknowledge the body as a necessary and essential attribute of human existence. In contemporary discussions, such issues as abortion and euthanasia will have to provide a rationale for why the preservation of the body is so important, tied up as it were in our concept of human dignity, meaning the sacred value of all human life. Sex and gender discussions are inextricably related to discussions of the body. Our understanding of the nature of the physical form of a human being will determine whether we see the sexual human condition as a blessing or a curse of human existence. It will also determine what to think about the legitimacy of transgenderism as a viable way of life. Race can be used as a justification for exploiting a person when the body is deemed secondary to the soul and therefore of minimal importance. A similar abuse can also happen to women, whose embodied existence is often reduced to men's property in whatever form patriarchal societies may take. For all Christians, human embodiment is central as Christianity's requirement to be attentive to the material needs of others is not limited to their so-called "spiritual" needs. Both bodily and spiritual needs go hand in hand (see: Mt 25: 31-46). For Christians, the body cannot be reduced to an object of exploitation, whether for labor, objectification, or sex.



All of these issues inform this research project and explain the choice for the title of this Master's thesis. God has created us to be essentially embodied and is full of compassion for our human bodily condition (Lk 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). This makes the human body a central component for worship, by which we acknowledge and give thanks to God for his understanding of what we need and his overabundant kindness.

In this research I will argue that bodily existence is essential to human nature and that Christian worship practices must go hand-in-hand with a sound understanding of human embodiment in order to be faithful to the essence of Christianity.

This research project will be divided in three parts. The first part explores the biblical-theological foundations for a positive doctrine of the human body. In the second part, we will turn to a positive doctrine of human embodiment in a theological-sacramental perspective. Such doctrine has its roots in Christ-Jesus, His incarnation and resurrection, and the way in which these events and life conditions inform and affirm embodied human existence. Finally, in the third part, worship will be examined in relationship to the formative power of rituals, the social and spiritual power of architectural organization, and the necessity for human diversity insofar as God's will is to establish a sanctuary of living stones to be his/her dwelling place forever (1 Peter 2:5).

## **Part One: Biblical-Theological Elements for a Positive Christian Doctrine of the Human Body**

Since the first pages of the book of Genesis, embodiment is regarded as essential to human existence. The body is the inescapable state of human existence, as we are born in one and die in one and are not alive without one. Christian worship and spirituality develop powerful layers of meaning when embodiment is seen as God-willed, good, unavoidable,

and positive. It is with their bodies that God's people come together as a community of worship under Moses' leadership in the desert; that God's people perform the annual pilgrimages to God's house in Jerusalem; and it is in Christ's body that all of Jesus' believers are incorporated for offering to God a worship in spirit and truth in the name of God (Jn 4:24; Rom 12:1).

In both the Old and New Testament's humans make time to leave the space of their everyday lives and enter into a sacred space in the hope of receiving a physical and spiritual restoration on a personal and communal level. An orthodox understanding of human embodiment is a necessary predicate not only for properly practicing worship and spirituality in the Judeo-Christian traditions, but also for providing a specific meaning for time and space as perceived according to biological and physical laws. Nevertheless, this insight was often lost throughout Church history, as ascetic movements introduced into the Church negative views and doctrines pertaining to the human body and embodied existence. These disagreements in the history of the Church regarding the human body raise the following questions: does Scripture endorse such views? Or up to which point can such positions be theologically founded in Scripture?

### **1.a. The human body in light of Scripture: clarifications about the goodness of the human body**

The Old Testament lays the groundwork for a foundational Jewish and Christian understanding of humankind, that of human beings made alive by God and commissioned as a species to be stewards of God's creation. The body plays no less a part in the constitutional makeup of a person than any other components of human existence. The

human body is both good and necessary for humanity to fulfill their required vocation in the world, flowing from God's work of creation and redemption.

Genesis 1:26-27 serves as the starting point for the Bible's reflection upon human nature. It is clear that humanity is inextricably united with the earth as the text names them *ha adam*, which is linguistically related to the *adamah* or earth. *Ha adam* stands generically for all humanity, given that all humans are earth creatures without any distinction as to sex, gender, race, or status. It also designates a distinct figure in the biblical narrative, Adam, or *ish*, a masculine person living in communion with *isha*, or woman. As generic humankind, man and woman stand for the prototypical humans and all humankind to follow. But man and woman are also designated as created in God's image and likeness, while the Hebrew terms applied to God relate him/her variously to a spirit (*ruach*, beginning with Gen. 1:2), to a plural term meaning gods (Elohim, beginning in Gen. 1:1) and to Yahweh, a name revealed to Moses in Ex 3:14. This last passage expresses God's particular way of being, not created by anyone, and encapsulated by the expression "I am who I am," also known as the great "I AM."

These names, used to designate God, raise the question of how man and woman living in a human body with different sexual characteristics can be said to be created in God's image and likeness, given that God does not share in male nor female sex. God's proper source of life does not reside in a body, driven by biological laws and sex by which creatures periodically overcome death within the great cycle of life. But it is God's specific divine life condition which is source for all physical life and all physical life is in a vital relationship with God (Jn 1:1-4).

According to Genesis 2:7, *Ha Adam* is made “from the dust of the ground,” or *adamah*. This text insists on the physical nature of human life as God, like a potter, forms a human being from dust (2:8). God’s action affirms humanity within the created order as physical creatures. This earthen creature is then given a gift, the *nismat hayyim* or “breath of life,” upon which *Ha Adam* becomes a living being or *nefesh*. According to biblical thought, one does not “have” a *nefesh*, but one is or is not *nefesh*.<sup>1</sup> For human beings the breath of life is not something innate, as life is innate to animals. While God also creates animals, they are not equipped with the breath of life. The text affirms a fundamental unity between all living creatures, including the human beings, as all are made of clay, while a connaturality between God and the human beings is affirmed through the breath of life. It makes human beings unique within creation and confers them a mediating position between God and creation, but not between the genders. There is nothing in the text which allow to affirm that God established man over woman based on bodily characteristics, meaning his sex.

In the Bible, human life is also said to be lived out in a human body for which the Old Testament uses the term *basar*. The term *basar* is also applied to animals, but never to God,<sup>2</sup> signaling an ontological difference between the Creator God and the creatures. It is most often used to refer to the visible components of the body, though it can refer to the whole at times.<sup>3</sup> *Basar* expresses the ‘earthy’ element of humanity, their bodily existence, which unites humanity with the rest of creation and establishes them as creatures. *Basar*

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<sup>1</sup> Schwarz, Hans. *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI: 2013. Pg. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Wolff, Hans Walter. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA: 1974. Pg. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 28.

can mean both flesh and the embodied existence of animals and humans,<sup>4</sup> and is the ““most comprehensive, most important, and most frequently used anthropological term for the external, fleshly aspect of human nature.”<sup>5</sup> While this term is not used in the Genesis account of the creation of man, the physical form of humanity is included in God’s pronouncement that the creation was “very good,”<sup>6</sup> which underlines that the physical existence of humanity is a positive thing. Additionally, it suggests that humankind’s bodily existence is not an obstacle for God establishing relationships with human beings. The human being in his/her fleshly existence is truly an appropriate contact person for God, while God does not establish a similar relationship with the other creatures.

The use of *basar* prevails after the first three chapters of Genesis. It generally refers to humanity in its weakness.<sup>7</sup> On one level, the use of this term simply means human existence is frail, in need of being taken care of, as underlined in the two Genesis creation narratives. On the other level, it also emphasizes humanity’s propensity to sin, to falter in faithfulness.<sup>8</sup> Such a view can lead to the perception of the human body as the root for sin, suggesting that the human body is a hindrance or obstacle to a right relationship with God. But the Bible will never endorse such a view. The somewhat negative views of *basar* notwithstanding, the proclamation of goodness in Genesis 1:31 remains valid from Genesis to the book of Revelation.

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<sup>4</sup> Schwarz 7.

<sup>5</sup> Bratsiotis, N.P. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 2003. 2:319.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff 31.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 6:12; Deut. 5:26; Psalm 65:2.

With the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, also called the Septuagint, Greek thought systems began exercising their influence on Hebrew understandings and on the New Testament writings. Two words in the Septuagint and subsequently the New Testament will express the reality of the body: *sarx* and *soma*. While *sarx* generally covers the range of meanings of the Hebrew term *basar*, the term *soma* is used most often to describe the living human body, individually or envisioned as a collectivity. *Soma* can be used to refer to sin,<sup>9</sup> yet is also used for designating the human body of Christ and of the community of the Church as well.<sup>10</sup> Instead of relying purely on the concept of *soma* for the human propensity to unfaithfulness, the New Testament, and especially St. Paul, also use the word *sarx*, commonly translated by ‘flesh,’ to express the feeble existence of humanity. *Sarx* does refer to the “physical corporeality” of humanity, and is often used to refer to the weak and ethically misdirected nature of humans.<sup>11</sup> However, corporeal weakness can be kept from such weakness and failure by living not according to it, but according “to the Spirit.”<sup>12</sup> *Sarx* can be used to mean the human physical form as well, as for example in 1 Corinthians 15:39. In those uses *sarx* can be roughly synonymous with *soma*, which can appear to suggest that if we see *sarx* as always negative then the human body is in fact a blight upon human life. But the complex use of the term *sarx* in the New Testament does not allow for this conclusion. In Colossians 1:22, Jesus Christ is said to have had a “fleshly (*sarx*) body (*soma*),” the death of which reconciled humanity to God. Thus, *soma* and *sarx* are both synonymous to the Hebrew *basar*, though

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:6, 7:24, et al.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 7:4, 12:5; Ephesians 1:23, 3:6; Colossians 1:22, et al.

<sup>11</sup> Schwarz 17.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:4; Galatians 3:3.

often to different aspects of it, and scripture globally does not take a wholly negative or condemnatory view of the human body. Rather, it is the dynamic created between the physical body of humanity and the invisible God that orients the body properly towards a visible communion between God and humankind, which is illustrated by God's words to Moses "have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them (Ex 25:8)."

God's will to dwell among human beings is the starting point of Israel's life experience with God, who elects first the tent of meeting in the wilderness, then the Temple of Jerusalem as a temporary indwelling place. Centuries pass by before the Temple of Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.. It proves to be, for the biblical authors, a *kairos* moment or world changing event as it leads them to the following new insight: in order to realize on earth God's very dwelling place, the gift of God's *nismat hayyim* or breath of life is not enough! This "vital principle which animates the body and enables one to feel, think, will, and desire,"<sup>13</sup> is too small to realize such a task! Rather, the human body needs to be empowered by the very Spirit of God. This evolution in Israel's theological thinking is signaled by the description of God's creation in Proverbs 3:19-20 and the task for building the tabernacle in Exodus 31 in terms of a work which needs God's spirit/*ruah* of wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

The biblical theme of God's spirit will undergo this new development with the Septuagint that introduces the Greek terms *psyche*/soul and *pneuma*/spirit. The *nismat hayyim* in Genesis 2:7 will be translated by *pneuma*, roughly "life," or "spirit," while the term *nephesh* is rendered by *psyche*, typically meaning "soul." At this time period the

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<sup>13</sup> Jewett, Paul K. *Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 1996. Pg. 38.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 85.

Greeks themselves made a significant shift from a strong anthropomorphic representation of their pantheon to a spiritualized perception of the divine, to which they attached the terms *psyche* and *pneuma*, an opposition of matter and body. This shift will weigh heavily on the biblical-theological worldview in two major ways. Jews of the diaspora in particular will suddenly adopt Greek ways of thinking along a dualistic thought system, which will also make it into Christian thinking via the Greek Church Fathers. As for the New Testament, writings they will continue to bear witness to a way of thinking that maintains the human being as a unified whole. In the New Testament the terms *psyche* and *pneuma* are used in another way, rather than in a dualistic perspective, as the event of Incarnation of God's word in Jesus of Nazareth allows the New Testament authors to reinterpret these terms in a specific Christian perspective.

While the use of language in the Septuagint can seem to presuppose that God's animating powers need to be present within the human body in order to accomplish the tasks for which humans were created, the New Testament will make it clear that the human being has to be endowed not with any divine spirit or breath, but the same Spirit Jesus was endowed with. In the New Testament God's Spirit is inseparable from Jesus of Nazareth and the Father. Therefore, one has to be "in Christ" in order to share in the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In this way it is only in Christ that human beings are revealed capable of offering worship truly acceptable and pleasing to God. This view is particularly true for the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* when he quotes the Greek translation of Psalm 40: 6-8, which reads "You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, **prepared a body for me**" instead of "you who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, **opened my ear**". It is not just about catching an invisible sound of God's Word carried by God's breath to fulfill God's will,



but about a renewed **body**, which is Jesus' body, conceived by the Holy Spirit, that makes an embodied encounter between the Eternal Word of God and humans possible. By encountering Jesus, humans start to share in the Spirit of the Father and the Son and are enabled to carry out God's will as Jesus himself carried out God's will in a way never realized so far on earth. This understanding is confirmed by Paul who urges the believers to offer their "bodies as a living sacrifice," an action by which they accomplish the *logike latreia* or spiritual worship truly pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). In the image of Paul, they are not bringing verbal prayers or material offerings to God, but their whole selves, including their bodily existence. God's strong rejection of Israel's prayers and sacrifices expressed through the voices of the prophets such as Isaiah, Amos, and Jeremiah make sudden sense (Is 1:10-17; Jer 7:1-15; Am 5: 21-25). How can God accept Israel's prayers, festivals, and worship as long as Israel does not surrender its entire bodily existence to God by acting with justice, loving with mercy, and walking humbly with one's God (Micah 6:8)? But with the Incarnation and Spirit of the Father and the Son bestowed on Jesus' disciples, their entire human existence, fully lived out in their bodies, becomes a permanent worship to God. There is no greater evidence given by Scripture in favor of a positive doctrine of the human body.

### **1.b. Human bodily existence: origin of a sanctuary for God**

Central to the biblical human being is his/her capacity for relationality, perceived in two ways. First, humans have the capacity to communicate with other human beings and with God through words. And second, humans create relationships through procreation, something that God does not do. Both ways of creating relationships will be essential to Israel's understanding of worship given that the Hebrew term "house," including God's

house, can be expressed by the term *beit*. In Hebrew to establish a house means to establish both a building and a family. Both meanings are central to Israel's creation narratives in Genesis as God establishes humans in God's cosmic sanctuary and blesses them with offspring. The perception of the universe as a cosmic sanctuary and the garden of Eden as the "house of God" is argued for strongly by Richard Middleton in his book *The Liberating Image*.<sup>15</sup> Middleton's position goes hand-in-hand with the view of human beings created as male and female, origin of a diverse and multifaceted humankind. To envision creation as a cosmic sanctuary and the garden of Eden as a house of God, gives a unique meaning to the human necessity for companionship and collaboration in God's creation, insofar as it sees in procreation not just a way of survival of the human species but of a way of taking care of God's house. In other words, procreation's ultimate goal is the construction of a sanctuary, a physical construct God elects as his/her dwelling place. In a New Testament perspective, this physical construct is revealed as not just a building of wood and stone, but a construct of living stones or as humans perceived as a collective body, the body of Christ (1 Peter 2:4-6; 1 Cor 12:12-31).

Female and male relationships, inclusive of sexuality, stand at the basis of a "house of God" envisioned as a multifaceted humankind, made of a multitude of races, tribes, clans, languages, and cultures. Sexuality is a fundamental and inescapable aspect of bodily existence that deeply impacts each person's experience of God. Human sexuality is unique as it is fundamentally associated with tasks that neither the animals nor God will ever do; animals will not build a sanctuary for God nor create religious systems and God will never

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<sup>15</sup> Middleton, J. Richard. *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*. Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, MI: 2005. Pg. 81-82.

create through procreation. From there it follows that the biblical vision of a sanctuary made of God's very sons and daughters, physical descendants of *ha adam* and Abraham and Sarah, will challenge typical patriarchal views of the relationships between men and women. Both creation narratives in Genesis bear witness to such a challenge. In Genesis 1:27 both man and woman are equally created in God's image, while in Genesis 2, man and woman are of the same bone and same flesh. Sexuality does not introduce a division between man and woman and sexual difference was not meant to establish a hierarchy between them. Man is not superior to woman based on his sex and woman is not superior to man as a mother. This kind of thinking is typical for those who confuse the biblical Creator with idols who stand at the basis of patriarchal structures.

As for the expression *ezer ke negdo* attributed to woman, it cannot be adequately translated by "helper", or understood as the one who assists man and is fundamentally inferior. Both creation narratives keep clear from introducing the idea of woman being inferior to man. What creates an equality between men and women is not a human decision nor an agreement between man and woman. Equality is determined by God who calls both to be stewards of creation and to realize in this world such a sanctuary for which the creation narratives serve as a blueprint. This view presupposes that for Israel these texts speak much more of a present-day situation and of a future still to come than of a past. Sexuality is a fundamental and inescapable aspect of bodily existence that by necessity deeply impacts each person's experience of God. Unfortunately, a widely received view of sin in Western theology, rooted in a fall-from-grace-reading of these texts developed by Augustine, has obscured for centuries the theological potential these texts possess for a positive Christian doctrine of the human body in general, and the female body in particular.

This traditional fall-from-grace reading has not only given a “Christian meaning” to sinful patriarchal structures but has also made the greatest of sins of bodily experience and especially sexual desire. It has religiously justified to blame male sexual desire on women and reduced them to dangerous temptresses that men ought to meet either with suspicion and fear or make sure they control. Whenever the intimate relationship between human procreation and the construction of a sanctuary is dismantled and/or used to justify oppressive civil and religious structures, there is no way for developing a fully positive doctrine of the human body, inclusive of men, women, and all human races and cultures.

Whoever bears in mind this intimate association between the divine sanctuary and human sexuality, relates human capacity of relationship not just to mere procreation, but to a social transformation for which women are just as necessary as men. It is through an embodied existence that all humans are enabled to relate to one another and to God through words, expressions, and signs far more complex than any other being. Through these complex acts of communication, the human body in its great variety is revealed as a necessary medium by which a civilization, or a highly developed culture, including social organization, government, laws, and arts, is made visible in the world. For the Bible this kind of civilization has its source in God’s sanctuary and is developed by humans when they run this sanctuary according to God’s instructions. The implementation of such a civilization cannot be narrowed down to a physical survival of a family line, for which men need women, but instead it requires women’s political, economic, religious and social contributions, making them just as necessary as men’s. The construction of a building always aims at and reveals a certain type of society. This deep interconnection between architecture and society is particularly true for Israel’s sanctuary as it aims at a very

particular social organization, government, laws, and arts which make Israel truly God's own among all the other nations of the earth.

For the biblical authors, human relationships have effects on human life going far beyond mere sexual activities, pleasure, raising kids, and organizing family life. They aim at a reality beyond space and time, which is God's kingdom and everlasting life in communion with God. As Christians we do not simply become parents of children living a life of 80 or 100 years, but children whose destiny is eternal either for good or for bad. For those who think deeper about this reality parenthood can suddenly become a daunting task. What is proper to the relational capacity of humanity is precisely the dimension of preparing oneself and whoever we encounter for life with God in God's sanctuary, which the Bible identifies as the heavenly Jerusalem, God's ultimate indwelling place. This relational capacity can be lived out through actions as simple as sharing who we are and what we possess, food, drink, clothes, human affection and time (Mt. 25: 31-46). Such actions, which are not gender specific, aim at introducing whoever we encounter into a community of a unity-in-multiplicity that is the Body of Christ, made of the twelve tribes of Israel and a multitude of every nation, people, tribe and language.<sup>16</sup> Whenever such a task becomes the stronghold of only one category of people, whether due to biological sex, race, or class, the realization of this task will suffer from undermining full human dignity, limiting development, access to, and opportunities for living to everyone's full human potential in the world and in the churches. Without male and female embodied existence there would be no proclamation of the Gospel, no worship, both relational-to-God and relational-to-each-other, no circulation of the various gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 12:14-31; Rev 7: 1-9.

the whole. Thus, the human body, be it the one of a woman or a man, stands at the center of all human relationships in multifaceted ways. In the Christian traditions all human relationships engage the very shaping of humankind into Christ's image and likeness, the ultimate sanctuary God elects as in-dwelling place.

### **1.c. The Image of God and the Human Body: when ruling over creation becomes a question of godly worship**

So far this research about the body in Scriptures has brought to the fore the enormous complexity of this topic given the cultural, philosophical and linguistic world in which the biblical authors live, think, and write. Now time has come to look deeper into biblical-theological anthropology and its relevance for Christian worship accomplished in human bodies. How can human beings created in God's image and likeness include physical embodiment? How can God's image be reflected in an embodied existence, in physical bodies of men and women alike, filled with God's presence, in humans truly speaking and acting in God's name whether they are men or women?

Humanity as a whole is said to be made in God's image and likeness in Genesis 1:27, which crowns humanity as mediating rulers, a type of "vice-regent" over God's creation as expressed also in Psalm 8:5-6. In Genesis 1:26 and 28, the vocation of humanity is outlined as ruling (*radah*) over creation. Right from the beginning, this vocation is presented as a complex activity which characterizes human beings: they are to be fruitful and multiply, to go forth, and they are granted dominion over the world. Thus, to be humans created in God's image is not something that we would already be, as if we would all start out as "God's image bearers", but it is fundamentally related to something we have still to become because in this world creation is always a creation in progress, not something

that is already achieved. As creatures, humans are not yet achieved but on a way to achievement. Therefore, to be created in God's image and likeness means to respond to a human vocation as outlined by God. In order to reach this goal, Humanity, *ha adam*, is given a calling, the calling to dominion in the sense of a delegated authority to care for and protect the world God made. By responding to this vocation humanity is meant to grow and reach the stature of a true son and daughter of God. Dominion includes all descendants of *ha adam* and excludes the oppression of human beings over other human beings. Once human beings take on this task, they either grow into sons and of daughters of God, or they fail to their vocation of becoming truly human, created in God's image and likeness.

The same can also be said for the second creation narrative, where the nature of "dominion" coincides with in the specific task entrusted to humanity in Genesis 2:15. The text reads, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Ruling creation is given as a stewarding task, one of caring for the world which is God's. This is affirmed by the Sumerian term *edin*, which is an abbreviation of *e-dingir*, a word that designates a "house of the gods."<sup>17</sup> Once more, humans are not to rule in an autocratic way, but commanded to till and to care for this garden as God previously did. In this text, the environment in which humans are put by God establishes their regal status. Both texts affirm in their own ways that to be created in God's image is to be granted "regal status,"<sup>18</sup> though one that is democratized rather than narrowly applied only to royalty, as

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<sup>17</sup> Callender, Dexter E. *Adam in myth and history. Ancient Israelite perspectives on the primal human.* Collection Harvard Semitic Studies ; Eisenbrauns. 2000. Pg. 42. See also Richard Middleton who highlights the representation of creation-as-temple in the ancient Near Eastern context as attested by Mesopotamian and Ugaritic sources. P.81.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch.* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI: 2012. Pg. 126.

*ha adam* designates all humankind without any distinction of sex, race and gender. Regal status does not apply to a happy few, singled out to be kings and queens, as this is the case in Ancient Near Eastern contexts.<sup>19</sup> This insight is made clear by the following poetic verses, which interrupt the narrative in Genesis 1:27,

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.*

Both male and female are here declared to be created in God's image and likeness. As in the Genesis narratives both are primeval or ur-humanity; it follows that all their descendants would likewise be created in that image.

This biblical view bears witness to an important difference between the biblical view of kingship and the politico-religious one as exercised by the nations among whom Israel lives, abundantly described by artifacts and written sources from the Ancient Near East. Among those, one can cite famous examples such as the visage of Ramses II hewn into a rock face, demonstrating his rule over the area, or the statue of Nebuchadnezzar raised up to declare regional dominance in Daniel chapter 1.<sup>20</sup> The over-dimensional representations of these kings are meant to express both their divine relationship to the gods and their political power. To such views the Bible opposes a vision of a fragile humankind, made of clay and nevertheless created in God's image, called to make God present in the created world through appropriate activities that honor God for his gifts of creation. To be in God's image does not mean that humans make themselves equal to the gods and goddesses like pagan kings and queens do, but rather is a way to rule with care,

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<sup>19</sup> Levering, Matthew. *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation*. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI: 2017. Pg. 166.

<sup>20</sup> Wolff, 160.



wisdom, understanding and knowledge. To rule in this way is rightly accomplished by drawing wisdom from God's cosmic sanctuary, or garden of Eden, created by God before humankind comes into existence and into which humankind is put by God. It is within such a liturgical context that humankind can learn how to rule in the way God rules, which is a worship for God. For while in the first creation narrative God is spirit and a being without a body and sexual distinctions, the second associates God much more with typical human functions without ever saying that God has a body. It signals that humankind's future is to exercise their mission of ruling within their embodied existence in the way God does without having a body and nevertheless assuming human functions. J. Richard Middleton in *The Liberating Image* provides perhaps the clearest argument for the image of God to be understood as the human vocation of transforming the creation into a Temple to God.<sup>21</sup> For Middleton, the image of God cannot be rightly understood without reference to the human body, insofar as ruling the world, conceived by God as a cosmic sanctuary, requires not only a likeness with God, but also a likeness to the world, i.e. a physical body.

In the antique world sanctuaries or temples built by human beings were destined to house the image or the statue of the god or goddess worshipped there. Temple clergy and royalty took daily care of the image or statue by providing food, clothes and entertainment for the divinity. The cult images of the gods and goddesses were never considered as mere wood or stone, but wood and stone in which the magical power of the divinities was indwelling. Israel, on account of its unique theological vision of God, could not represent God and venerate her God in the same way. For Israel, the earth creatures, man and woman, are revealed to be created to live as his/her representatives in the holy divine sanctuary.

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<sup>21</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*.

What hampers Israel to fulfill this task is their propensity for idolatry. Idolatry is to confuse Israel's God with the divinities of the pagan nations and to attribute to themselves a divine status. Again, the two Genesis creation narratives are revealed to be a blueprint for a future still to come. It raises the question of how Israel will be empowered for exercising such a task? As much as the creation of the human body has to be understood as a central and revelatory act for God's entire creation,<sup>22</sup> this revelation will run into huge difficulties as long as the gods are considered in the image of human beings, exercising male and female powers, and as long as Israel listens to a serpent which usurps God's authority when it alters God's words saying, "you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen 3: 5)". As long as Israel does not rule over creation, understood as a taking care of God's creation and house, which is essentially worship, they fail to represent God within creation and put their bodies at the service of destructive powers instead of leading their bodily existence as entirely dedicated to God and the task God entrusted to them.

A positive doctrine of the human body is therefore conditioned on a representation of God that is different from the one provided by human cultures. How will Israel respond to such a challenge? Will Israel go the way of a total spiritualization of human existence, where human bodies are stripped of meaning, where the human body is only perceived as an obstacle for being in God's image and likeness? Will Israel ever be able to resist to the temptation to confuse her God with the divinities of the nations? Or, will Israel develop a unique vision of her God's embodiment in Israel's human existence?

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<sup>22</sup> Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Revelatory Body: Theology as Inductive Art*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 2015. Pg. 7.

One day Israel will forge the image of a servant of God. It may be both, ironic and providential, that Israel elaborates this image at the time of the Babylonian exile. It is the time of the destruction of Israel's Temple and Temple institution, the time where Israel ceases up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to exercise any political power in the world. At this moment of history Israel starts to identify, for the first time, as a collective people without any distinction of sex and gender with a broken body. If it is true that "the Christian understanding of true humanity is rooted in reflection on the person of Jesus Christ,"<sup>23</sup> then the person of Jesus Christ must be central to any final interpretation of the theological significance of the human body, understood as a broken body. In becoming incarnate in Israel's flesh, the Eternal Word of God shared in the life of humans and revealed itself as Son of God embodied in Jesus of Nazareth. In him, existence in a human body and what it means to be in the image and likeness of God is revealed anew.

## **Part Two: Christ-Jesus, source and fulfillment of human embodiment: elements for a sacramental theology**

God's mighty actions in favor of Israel, such as creation, the Exodus, the Passover, the gift of the law and the promised Land, the appointment of a Messiah-king, and finally Jesus' Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, are "sacramental principles." A sacramental principle is a human event that does not just reveal God in some fashion,<sup>1</sup> but designates God's mighty actions in favor of his/her people, which God continues to enact

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<sup>23</sup> World Council of Churches, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: A Faith and Order Study Document*, Faith and Order Paper, no. 199 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 33.

<sup>1</sup> McBrien, Richard S. "Catholicism." Winston Press Inc., Minneapolis, MN: 1980. Pg. 731.

throughout history. It is in this way that Israel interprets and understands for example the Passover event. This event did not just take place once under Moses' leadership, but for Israel, God continues throughout history to lead his/her people out of situations of oppressions just as God did at Moses' time.

In the same way, a sacrament makes a historical event, together with elements of creation such as water, manna, wine, human gestures and words, inseparable from God's saving actions for his/her people throughout time. By such actions God reveals who he/she is so that a human response to God's mighty acts can take shape or form from generation to generation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the Passover event is not just to be celebrated every year as a reminder to not forget what God did once upon a time. Year by year, this celebration confers on Israel her specific identity of not just a people among other nations, but a people-saved-by-God, and a people that continues to ask God, year by year, to renew his/her mighty acts of liberation from bondage until the final fulfillment of God's promises at the end of time. In this way, the Passover celebration unites in a single moment past, present, and future of Israel's history and allows Israel to experience here and now what will be realized tomorrow.

Sacraments in the Christian tradition adopt this pattern. They make it possible for those who receive them to participate in something more than the symbols themselves, as sacraments allow participation in the very reality they symbolize. In other words, to listen to the gospel narratives and to undergo baptism or take part in the Lord's supper is to find oneself in the very situation the disciples underwent while Jesus was with them and to anticipate the situation of generations of disciples still to come as well as the final

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid 732.

realization of this meal in God's kingdom. Thus, sacraments shape our response to God's words and actions. By doing so they create in us a new identity or to put it in the words of John's prologue; they give the power to become children of God, called to live forever in God's household or sanctuary.

## **2.a. Incarnation and Human Body: cornerstones of God's holy sanctuary**

With the Incarnation God intervenes within human history in an absolute and new way in comparison to all the saving acts performed so far in favor of his/her people Israel, as the Incarnation represents a unique act of creation by which God saves his/her people in an absolute and new way. The earliest Christian records, the letters of Paul, bear witness to the Incarnation as the foundational or source sacrament, insofar as they perceive Jesus as the New Adam, the one who takes anew the task outlined in the two Genesis creation narratives. Where the first *ha adam* had failed, the New Adam would succeed.<sup>3</sup> The incarnation is a culminating point in Scripture as it ties the question of why the Son of God became incarnate to the human body. If the essential aspect of human nature were in fact something more ethereal, whether pure mind or some disembodied spirit, then for God to become human would be an unnecessary step. Presumably, the Eternal Word of God could have found some equally immaterial means by which to save our immaterial selves, leaving simply our bodies to rot. Yet early Christians argued, even claimed, that belief in the Son

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<sup>3</sup> The theology of Irenaeus of Lyons is a prominent example of such views. Wingren, Gustaf. *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*. Trans. Ross Mackenzie. Muhlenberg Press, Philadelphia, PA: 1959. Pg. 127.

of God as a truly, physical human being, was foundational to the faith.<sup>4</sup> Why is this aspect of the Christian faith so crucial?

In the beginning, God created all things and called them good. According to the second creation narrative, what corrupts God's created world is the serpent's arrogance to speak as if it were God. The serpent's words found humankind's propensity for idolatry, which consists of making gods and goddesses out of embodied creatures, be they trees, animals or humans. Thus, humankind got stuck in and became captive to idolatry. It is not creation as such that makes the world and humankind corrupt, but human beings listening more to the words of a creature than to God's word. This act founds the present condition of all earthly creatures. For this reason, God's redemptive purpose does not just extend to the whole of human life, including the body, but also to the physical world humans live in (Rom 8:22-23). But above all, redemption will be for God to deal with the discourse of the serpent once for all and heal humans from their idolatrous propensity and disease, a task which proves to be inseparable from a restoration of God's entire creation. To reach this goal, which will be in the end to reign anew over creation, requires, according to God's own blueprint given in Genesis 1 and 2, not only a likeness with God, but also a likeness with the world, i.e. a physical body. The one to perform such a task will be God's Eternal Word made flesh in Israel, the cornerstone of God's definite sanctuary initiated with creation and the Garden of Eden, where worship is forever implemented and purified from whatever idolatrous propensity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:2; 1 Cor. 15:12-19; St. Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians*, chapter 7, trans. Cyril Richardson. [https://www.orderofstignatius.org/files/Letters/Ignatius\\_to\\_Ephesians.pdf](https://www.orderofstignatius.org/files/Letters/Ignatius_to_Ephesians.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See : Psalm 118, in particular verse 22.

In his work on the revelatory aspects of the body, Luke Timothy Johnson demonstrates how scripture points to God being revealed primarily through the human body and actions. The image of God is made present in the world via the body, and God's will is lived out in an embodied existence. Turning to the embodiment of Christ, Johnson helpfully points out that the New Testament is "no less emphatic" that the human body is the primary medium of God's communication to the world, and thus, the body of Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of God's revelation in and through His body.<sup>6</sup>

God's Eternal Word comes into the world devastated by the serpent's words and humans eager to listen to it, as the New Adam. Throughout his human existence, lived out in a true human body, Jesus of Nazareth confronts the serpent's discourse with all its facets. To fulfill this task, Jesus himself needs to grow in stature, wisdom, and insight (Lk 2:20). In the image of the first *ha adam*, Jesus had to exercise discernment when faced with the serpent's temptations and make the choice to be obedient to God (Mt 4 and Luke 4). Through His obedience, Jesus grows into the paradigmatic human, who is perfected through His obedience to the Father to the point of suffering and death (Hebr 5:9). In response to the offering Jesus makes of his broken body, God justifies his servant and establishes in his broken body God's very life, not based on biological laws and sexual powers, but on God's unique capacity by which God says, "I AM". It allows the author of the letter to the Colossians to proclaim that he *is* the image of the invisible God, head of his body, the Church, reconciling to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross (Col 1:15-20).

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Luke Timothy 51-52. 55-56.

The understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as the second *ha adam* raises the question of the new Eve, a renewed humankind, capable of bringing into the world sons and daughters of God in full communion with the new Adam. The question of the New Eve is essential, insofar as the blueprint outlined in the two creation narratives remains valid from Genesis to Revelation. The construction of God's sanctuary of which Jesus is the cornerstone, is not a question of establishing a temple or church building in wood or stone, but a question of bringing into the world God's very sons and daughters, the ultimate dwelling place of God and the Lamb.

## **2.b. Jesus Christ, Image of God, and the New Eve**

While the designation of Jesus as the New Adam is taken for granted, the question of the New Eve is barely noticed by theologians or pastors. A certain representation of *ha adam* as a single man, created by God first, has certainly contributed to obscure the figure of the New Eve. It raises the question of man being alone created in God's image, while women are considered only in God's image and likeness inasmuch as they depend on a man. This view of women only created in God's image when they depend on men was supported by Augustine who handed it down to the entire Western Church.<sup>7</sup> In this way the question of the New Eve was quite totally overshadowed by an all-powerful New Adam, identified as a single male, while women were pushed into subservient roles under the control of men.

Now, if the Incarnation of God's Eternal Word aims at retaking anew the task of the first Adam, then the question of Eve cannot be put under the rug for the following

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<sup>7</sup> Sumner, Sarah. *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Church Leadership*. IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL: 2003. Pgs. 43-44.



simple reason: if in Genesis 1 both, man and woman are created in God's image and likeness, and if in Genesis 2 the woman is bone of bones and flesh of flesh taken from the first *ha adam*, then the New Eve should also be in God's image and likeness as the New Adam is, and she also has to be bone of bones and flesh of flesh of this New Adam. The constant insistence on an imbalanced reading of Genesis 2-3 as a fall-from-grace and a story of the sin to-be-blamed-on-the-woman-alone, made the theme of the creation of the New Eve in the image of Jesus and out of Jesus' very bones and flesh invisible. Among the Greek and Latin Church fathers, Irenaeus of Lyons was unique in having tackled the question of the new Eve in depth.<sup>8</sup> What prevailed in the text and in the mind of the great majority of male interpreters was the physical female body, the main instrument of temptation on which men usually blamed their sexual desires, depicted in thousands of paintings and sculptures of "Adam and Eve," realized by men alone as women were socially excluded from any public artistic undertakings until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is no wonder that the woman's body became the major symbol for the serpent or the devil. This view could not foster any deeper theological reflection on the origin of a New Eve emerging from Jesus death and resurrection. It also neutralized any question about a necessary mutual assistance between the New *ha adam* and the New Eve. Why would Jesus, a man and all-powerful Son of God, need a woman to realize salvation, usually always narrowed down to a forgiveness of sins functioning like a ticket for heaven as long as someone just believed that Jesus saved him/her? What the heavy emphasis on the forgiveness of sins obscures is God's project of a sanctuary the risen Lord realized in

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<sup>8</sup> Steenberg, M.C. "The Role of Mary as Co-Recapitulator in St. Irenaeus of Lyons," *Vigiliae Christianae* 58 (2004): Pg. 133.

communion with the New Eve. This new Eve are all those who granted hospitality to Jesus and believed in him throughout his life on earth, starting with his mother Mary, and Jesus' female and male disciples. Without the believing actions of women and men from Jesus' conception to his death on the cross, his resurrection, and the commission entrusted by the risen Lord to his male and female disciples, there would be simply no salvation history.

The narrowing down of Jesus' salvific actions to a forgiveness of sins and the progressive transformation of Jesus' image into a politically correct image matching patriarchal expectations has cut Jesus from his Jewish origins and culture, already shaped for centuries by God's saving acts and words. But for the one who reads Jesus' words and action truly in the context of Scripture and not of one's wish dreams, Jesus did not just come into the world to forgive sins so that we could make it into heaven. Rather, he came into the world for the purpose of accomplishing humanity's vocation of exercising dominion over creation as Israel's Messiah-King (Jn 12:32). As such he does not act as a lonely hero, surrounded by twelve men, but lives in an inseparable relationship with a messianic court and messianic people. It explains Jesus' utmost determination to go to Jerusalem, the city of David and center of the Messiah-King's reign. Jesus' controversies with the Temple institution of his time are central to his mission, given that this institution was utterly alienated from its primary vocation to be God's house, or as Jesus says, "my Father's house" and a "house of prayer for all nations." These terms in Jesus' mouth designate precisely the garden of Eden, understood as God's house, and all creation conceived as a cosmic sanctuary, where man and woman alike exercise royal and priestly functions.

All humanity in her bodily existence has a revealing function, both individually and corporately.<sup>9</sup> But in Jesus' case the revealing function of his physical body is origin of new perspectives. Here the reader has to confront the following question: does he/she want to narrow down Jesus' image to what they think and agree with? Or, are they willing to be receptive to these new perspectives, to Jesus, New *Ha Adam* and Messiah-King, who brings to completion God's promises to Abraham, Sarah, and David, according to the words of Psalm 87 where all peoples of the world can say that they were born in Zion? In other words, will his broken body and poured out blood become the source of re-creation and of a new identity for their own bodily existence? Will the sharing in his broken body and poured out blood lead them to recognize in themselves the New Eve living for ever in communion with the New *Ha Adam* as the finally achieved the New Humankind?

### **2.c. Jesus' Body is the Church and the cosmic sanctuary**

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not an isolated incident, but the beginning of a long sequence of unfolding events in time, ushering in the fulfillment of God's original purpose, articulated by Irenaeus as "recapitulation,"<sup>10</sup> and based on the opening hymn of the letter to the Colossians 1:15-20. This original purpose is revealed anew in Christ, the image of the invisible God, who fulfills what the original humanity created in God's image was meant to achieve, i.e. the bringing into the world countless sons and daughters of God and the transformation of the cosmos into a temple for a worship truly acceptable by and pleasing to God. With Jesus' Incarnation, however, this bringing into the world countless sons and daughters of God reaches a new stage, as he dissociates it from physical male and

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, Luke Timothy 62.

<sup>10</sup> Wingren 81.

female sexuality. Jesus does not secure the future of his movement through marriage, but through a call to discipleship addressed to men and women alike. In other words, Jesus does not mobilize sexual powers to create for himself a new people, but the willingness of women and men to give to Jesus' call a positive reply through believing in him and leading lives similar to his, as his disciples and followers.

Jesus' Incarnation and life on earth in fulfillment of his mission as Israel's Messiah-King could have never been carried out without women and men putting their faith in him, while walking on earth, and sharing his unique mission with him. They are full protagonists in his story as without them there would be no story of Jesus. As his story is also their story, they become one with him, standing with him in his trials and sharing with him in his last supper, where he identifies bread and wine with his body and blood. With his death on the cross it is to them that he entrusts his broken body and blood, together with the waters of baptism until the end of time. They are the first fruit of his saving actions, the Church or new humankind, by which they become similar to him, re-formed in his image and likeness, as he draws those who follow him, from their human, embodied existence into his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven.

Scripture does not envision an eradication of old humankind, replaced by a completely new and different one. The new creation, rather, is said to be saved and redeemed by the Eternal Word of God taking on a human body in the image of the first *ha adam*. The continuity between the first and the new *ha adam* is ensured by the bodily existence of the Eternal Word of God, which extends to his sacramental body, the Church, until his salvation and redemption is also firmly established in the bodies of those Jesus calls his brothers and sisters. Jesus' death and resurrection do not stand for a mere return

into the garden of Eden, but for a re-creation of humankind and a cosmic sanctuary which had never been achieved in Eden. In the past, today, and tomorrow, the relationship of human beings with the first earth creatures remains unbroken, but it is also brought to completion as God's life-giving Spirit raised Jesus from the dead and introduced him into God's heavenly sanctuary. If the new humanity is God's sanctuary, those in whom God's presence is made manifest, then Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, makes God's fullness also visible in his body, the Church. But how can such a thing as God's fullness be achieved in our personal broken stories and bodies?

It starts out with our belief that Jesus of Nazareth was a 1st century Jewish man, but not that only. He was and is also the second Adam, in whom all humanity is able to find a larger identity, meaning, and purpose, than the one conferred by our understanding of race, status, and sex. Salvation and redemption find a way into our hearts when we realize the following difference between Christ and us. He, from the moment of His incarnation, was the human flesh by which an eschatological in-breaking could occur, in the way of "yeast, a woman took and mixed with flour till it was leavened all through (Lk 13:21)." The "yeast" stands for Jesus' saving life and death, which accomplishes our redemption but also subsequently affects the ways we think of race, status, and sex. The work of the yeast deposited in our bodily existence is to transform our ways of seeing race, status, and sex until they are seen in God's proper light. Race must be seen in light of the one race of sons and daughters of *ha'adam* or Abraham, Sarah, David and Jesus, giving a status as people who exercise priestly and royal functions proper to the race of God' sons and daughters. All kinds of physical characteristics, including sex, must be understood as existing in a world where such characteristics were not meant to establish and justify

structures of domination, oppression, and violence, be it in politics, economy, society, and religion. Ultimately, in Christ, the risen Lord, it is not just humanity that is restored, but because of humankind's earthly condition which unites her with all creation, the entire creation can share in restoration as well. For this reason, Romans 8:19 expresses eagerly the "longing" of creation for humanity's salvation to be completed, while Christ affirms in Revelation 21:5 that He is "making all things new." In Christ is found both the source and the goal of humankind, a new cosmos where distinctions such as stones, plants, animals, humans do not separate, but bring multifaceted blessings to the entire creation. It is in such a recreated cosmos that a for-humans-alone-impossible-unity can occur and be maintained forever by the one and unique worship of God and the Lamb (Rev. 21).

#### **2.d. The resurrection: the power to transform of hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, that worship God in spirit and truth**

At this point, Jesus' resurrection emerges as a key issue, insofar as it makes it clear that such a transformation is inseparable from a passage through death in this world in Christ leading also into Christ's resurrection. This insight is particularly underlined in Luke 20:35-36, where sexuality is put into a new light by Jesus saying, "But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection." Jesus of Nazareth himself points to this new reality when he does not sexually conform to the standards of the patriarchal cultures of his time as he does not marry or found a traditional family, but establishes new family structures by calling all to discipleship and travels with both adult female and male disciples (Lk 8: 1-3). How does this sexually non-conforming

lifestyle extend to Jesus' glorious, risen state? Does the resurrection suddenly transform Jesus into a divine super-male ruling with benevolence over his body, the Church? Did Christ install a Church where, faithful through and through to a patriarchal worldview, the leadership quickly established itself in the privileged position of head and leader by the simple fact that they are men? Or, does Jesus' resurrection establish in his Church the assurance in our hearts that sinful ways of thinking about race, status, and sex can be healed in him, that a re-creation into God's very own race can affect our whole being? Does the resurrection require that the Church sees exercising priestly and royal functions according to this race, and living with one another in ways where sex is not any more a tool for oppression, gaining and affirming one's status and privileges over other people?

To encounter Jesus through the narratives of his physical life on earth is for many the starting point of a liberation experience. Not only does Jesus break down barriers in our hearts, but he enables women and men alike to break down social and community barriers in turn. He disrupted and blurred the lines between conventional social distinctions, regularly acting in ways that were not culturally appropriate for His existence as a Jewish male. Furthermore, Jesus enabled women and men to do so too. On this path of liberation, women and men encountered a great variety of obstacles due to the entanglement of their own lives in culture, customs, fear, pride, and education. For all of Jesus' disciples the goal to reach is encompassed in Paul's affirmation in Galatians 3:28 where class, ethnicity, and gender are to be lived out in a unique oneness with Christ.

Diversity of humankind is good when reconciled in Christ and brought to oneness. This oneness is not established and regulated by sex and patriarchal structures, but by a liturgical lifestyle of which the celebration of the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus' death

and resurrection is and remains the life-giving fountain and goal. All sacramental theology is ultimately teleological, but unfortunately, many Christians today tend to reduce the life of Christ to Christmas and His passion, and very often simply cannot make anything out of His resurrection, and therefore the resurrection in which believing humanity will one day share.

At this point it is worth noting that there is a long tradition of misunderstanding and rejection of the resurrection since Jesus' *three* announcements of his passion and resurrection in Luke 9:22, 45 and 18:34. In these passages the announcements go first unnoticed by the disciples closest to him (9:22); then they were too afraid to ask him (Lk 9:45); finally they do not understand, as the meaning of these words were hidden from them. Up to which point are these three reactions still the case today? Do Jesus' disciples today turn intentionally or unconsciously away from the resurrection of the body? Why would they be afraid to ask? Why would the meaning of the resurrection be still hidden from them now that Jesus' resurrection is realized? Do these three reactions reveal a human limit to deal with the question of the resurrection of the body as long as the risen Lord does not make himself present to them and as long as they resist to becoming women and men of faith in the image of Thomas (Jn 20)?

As Joel Green points out, the Christian view of the resurrection has "stubbornly" focused on the physicality of human existence, rooted in Christ.<sup>11</sup> Christians have failed to recognize in Jesus' resurrection the transforming power of his life-giving Spirit in their own lives. Many have made of the resurrection a proof of Jesus' divinity, used for justifying

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<sup>11</sup> Green, Joel. *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible*. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI: 2008. Pg. 141.



their claims for prestige and power. Other Christians have turned to a view of a disembodied and spiritual awakening to secure humanity's future. They have simply given up on a deeper consideration of the resurrection of the body, along with Christ's ascension and sending of the Spirit to the embryonic Church, as Christ's ultimate saving actions for humanity. In contrast to these either politically power-hungry or spiritualistic trends, the New Testament scriptures insist on the risen Lord sending the disciples on the roads of this world. What matters to the risen Lord is to have them undergo a life experience similar to his, fully lived out in their bodies as is heavily underlined in Paul's ministry. Scripture ties the understanding of the resurrection of the body to the absolute necessity of a life experience in one's own body. Therefore, the question is, are Christians willing to undergo such an experience? A closer look at the resurrection narratives confirms this centrality of the human body and allows a more in-depth understanding of how Christ's resurrection confirms that human existence is inseparable from a bodily dimension never envisioned in such new ways in the Old Testament Scriptures.

### **2.d.1. What stands at the center of the Resurrection narratives?**

What strikes the reader strongly in the resurrection narratives is the absence of a description of Jesus' bodily resurrection. In contrast, the narratives insist on various encounters with the risen Lord. It is these encounters that provide the lens through which our own bodily existence and entrance into Jesus' resurrection can be understood. Luke 24 is a key text that explores this intimate relationship between the disciples' bodily existence and the risen Lord. Chapter 24 of Luke has to be read in light of the three announcements made by Christ about His upcoming suffering, death, and resurrection (9:18-22; 43-45; 18:31-34), already mentioned in the previous paragraph. These passages underline the

disciples' absolute incapacity to reach an understanding of Jesus' words on their own. Even after the reports about the empty tomb, the angels' or young men's messages at the tomb, or Mary Magdalene's proclamation and teachings, the disciples did not believe,<sup>12</sup> an attitude which also extends to moments when the risen Lord himself appears among them (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:17. 40-41). In other words, our human bodies with all their visual, tactile, and intellectual capacities fall short in recognizing the risen Lord. But the realization that Jesus rose from the dead is conditioned on specific sacramental actions by which the risen Lord makes himself present as he does for the disciples on the road. In this way, faith in the risen Lord grows progressively as a consequence of the Lord's gifts of the Spirit present in him anew as the risen Lord and the capacity to interpret the Scriptures he conveys in his condition of risen Lord to his disciples. This growth in faith culminates in the breaking of the bread, by which finally the recognition of the risen Lord occurs for the disciples (Lk 24: 31). Both interpretation of Scriptures and breaking of the bread appear as highly liturgical actions.

A great number of pre-and post-resurrection encounters with Christ happen around a meal, which points to the centrality of the meal offered and prepared by Jesus himself, such as the multiplication of the loaves and fish, culminating with Jesus' Last Supper. These meals prove to be key in a progressive understanding of who Jesus is, provoking a transformation of hearts of stones into hearts of flesh. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us? (24:32)", they say to one another on the road back to Jerusalem in their desire to share with the community

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<sup>12</sup> Byrne, Brendan J. *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN: 2015. Pg. 188.

their transformative experience. After the Resurrection Jesus, the risen Lord, invites the disciples to encounter him anew by using the same gestures employed before his resurrection: he taught them first, then took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples. More and more it becomes clear that the centrality of Jesus' bodily existence is extended in this bread, wine, and gestures. By these actions Jesus, the Christ, reveals God anew to His people as had never occurred so far, although this mysterious reality was always present in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (24: 27.44). Israel has always communicated with God embodied in the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms, but from now on this work is to be done in communion with Israel's Messiah-king risen from the dead by God's Spirit. In His interaction with the disciples, Jesus, the risen Lord, explains that the same Spirit who empowered him would empower them to go forth,<sup>13</sup> as he himself did. By doing so, Jesus reveals that his very own mission extends to them and is embodied by them. While Christ's incarnate body was significantly transformed through his death and the resurrection, their own bodily existence is disclosed to be essential to this mission. With the resurrection Jesus' humanity is not spiritualized, but it is reconfirmed in the disciples' very own human experience and existence. The vocation of humanity is to worship God as Jesus did in his incarnate existence, culminating with Jesus' last Passover meal, Jesus uses as an interpretation of his own death and resurrection. As for the disciples their task is to lead all creation to such a worship in the same way as Jesus did for them, for those who believe in them, and for all humankind. To reach this goal, the disciples need to be empowered in their human bodies by God's Spirit of Wisdom and Truth as Jesus himself was.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid 192.

The belief in Jesus' resurrection is more than an intellectual conviction about his resuscitation or return from the dead. Belief in the resurrection is to experience one's proper transformation starting with one's heart and extended to one's body as Christ reveals himself anew as the risen Lord in our own broken bodies. Just as the severe physical trauma of the crucifixion that Jesus' body underwent did not put an end to his human existence, whatever we undergo does not put an end to our own bodily existence. Christ, the risen Lord, still bears the holes in His hands and feet from the nails and in His side from the spear, but these are found not to be mortal. In the same way whatever holes made in our human existence, they will not prove to be mortal. But these holes, just as for Jesus, will manifest God's life-giving power. With Jesus' resurrection what becomes central is that Jesus identifies with the humanity of his disciples. It is with his resurrection that his God is from now on our God, and his Father our Father (Jn 20: 17). As disciples our difficulty is not to grasp Jesus' resurrection within the limits of sophisticated speculations about Jesus' risen body, but to realize that our own bodies are deeply affected by Jesus' resurrection in two ways: either we experience in different ways how the risen Lord transforms who we think we are, or we resist to such a transformation, wanting to continue to be just who we have decided we are.

#### **2.d.2. Pauline Perspectives on the Risen Lord**

In his own reflection on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, St. Paul explores some of the issues also raised by the resurrection narratives in the gospels. St. Paul argues in 1 Cor. 15 that Jesus of Nazareth, the risen Lord, is the New Adam, who inaugurates a new way of being human in the life of the resurrection growing out of a life dominated by death in the wake of the first Adam. As the New *Ha Adam*, Christ in His resurrection is

inaugurating a New Creation where all will come to life again in Christ.<sup>14</sup> In vss. 35-58, St. Paul gives extended attention to the resurrection of the body, which has come under critique by the Corinthian Christian community,<sup>15</sup> while Paul ties the denial of the bodily resurrection to a denial of precisely recognizing the power of the risen Lord in one's own existence lived out in the world

For Paul, the continuity of the Christian communities depends on a life within a body, made possible by the risen Lord, and the capacity of the disciples to welcome the power of the risen Lord into their own lives. Resurrection does not mean reanimation, but transformation, the changing of the human bodily condition of something perishable into something that is "imperishable" as Paul would put it (1 Cor. 15:42), by an entire recreative process. Paul himself experiences such a process in his own bodily existence (2 Cor 4: 7-12).<sup>16</sup> The human body remains for him the *locus* of God's revelation in the world, and the means by which the believers offer a worship truly pleasing to God as Jesus himself did. He considers his ministry as a priestly office of proclaiming God's gospel "so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 12: 1-2 and 15: 16). The goal of his ministry is not to transform people into "Jesus freaks" or to make a certain church community politically strong, but the unique goal of his ministry is to transform all, including Paul himself, into an offering acceptable to God.

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<sup>14</sup> Johnson, Luke Timothy 62.

<sup>15</sup>Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in NICONT. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 1987. Pg. 775.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 777.

### **Part Three: Worship as formative power and gendered experience of rituals: road to the achievement of God's house and holy priesthood**

The resurrection narratives make it clear that liturgical actions, such as the study of Scripture in light of Jesus' invitation to share in his unique eucharistic meal, create a radically new understanding of human existence transcending space and time. God reveals himself not just within an invisible, but also in a visible creation as the Church affirms in her creeds. In the same way, the Eternal Word of God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, does not reveal him/herself as an abstract idea, but in events happening to Jesus and to humans who are affected in their hearts and bodies by Jesus and Jesus' disciples. In other words, God can be said to be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ and Jesus' sacramental body, the Church.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder, that beginning with the creation narratives, God mobilized his/her people around the physical construction of a sanctuary and a great variety of artifacts, vestments, and texts to be used for worship. For Israel, worship is not just to pray and sing to God's glory for an hour per week and then return to real business. On the contrary, worship is an activity rooted in all kinds of human professions exercised by men and women alike such as: architects, administrators, carpenters, gold- and silversmiths, musicians, mothers, fathers, poets, lawyers, teachers, tailors and seamstresses, sculptors, priests, prophets, mathematicians, people capable of water related architecture and design, scribes, physicians, astronomers, athletes, navigators, businessmen and women, farmers, butchers, cooks, perfumers, bakers,

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Dorothy. "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no. 1, 2010. Pg. 115 and 127.

winemakers, weavers, and whatever human activity that mobilizes the gifts and skills of all members of a community. This fact is particularly underlined by the Greek term *leitourgos* from which derives the term liturgy or worship, meaning work of the people. It usually designates all forms of public service where all people come together for the good of the entire community. This action or work extends from founding a family to political actions such as the defense of the city against the enemy.

In a Christian context, to perform a liturgy or to worship is the work of the people in service to God and to one another.<sup>2</sup> In Israel this work emerges as a response to God's own work of creation, salvation, and preservation, as outlined in the creation narratives and God's covenant with Abraham, Sarah and David. Through worship, God's people respond to God's covenantal promises of which the sons and daughters of Abraham, Sarah, and David become the beneficiaries. These covenants remain unique in the history of religions as no gods and goddesses would ever promise to share their prestige and power with all frail human and untrustworthy creatures. At best, they make out of very few humans raised to a divine status an exception which confirms the general rule. For this reason, Israel's covenantal experience functions as a lens through which all of Israel's liturgical expressions are examined and filtered. It leads Israel to sometimes radical actions, such as eradicating artifacts pertaining to pagan worship. At the same time, it also leads to a progressive transformation of pagan artifacts and teachings in Israel's effort to develop her own views of a godly worship.

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<sup>2</sup> Senn, Frank. *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN 2016. Pg. 18.

The efforts of Israel to transform other civilizations' artifacts and beliefs, combined with God's promise of sons and daughters God calls his/her own, led Israel to perceive worship as a human matrix that allows human beings to be formed and equipped in view of their relationship with God. Society has always been key for religious rituals to emerge, as societies determine what this relationship with their divinities should look like, or how some kind of deal with the gods would be best successful. This rule is also true for Israel, but as Israel's society is determined by God's covenant, Israel's worship cannot be conceived as a deal with God. Rather, this transactional understanding, typical for pagan worship, gives way progressively to a comprehension of God's people, as a sacrament, a people created entirely by the power of God's word for the good of all humankind. As such, God's people become inseparable from rituals and their transforming power of hearts, minds, and bodies. The Incarnation of the Eternal Word of God discloses anew how far the transforming power of Israel's rituals go. They are meant to achieve a sanctuary out of human beings, where an everlasting indwelling of the triune God is realized and where the summit of worship is for God and humankind to enjoy one another.

### **3.a. What are rituals and why do they exist?**

All human beings have rituals, whether consciously or not, and all worship traditions are inescapably ritualistic, even if unknowingly. Rituals are gestures based on human conventions and proper to all humankind as they are the vehicles through which a socialization process takes place. To shake hands is a ritual typical for Western civilization as this gesture establishes a safe environment between two or more people coming together. Rituals mark the passage from one stage of human life to another such as birth, marriage, and death, but also transitions from home to college or retirement. They are indispensable



for adapting individuals and societies to new conditions and values of social life. Rituals have a formative power at all stages of life as they confer identity, teach how to behave in given situations, and empower people to embrace a new reality. At the same time, rituals shape human beings through stories and practical exercises, thus conveying to individuals and communities the necessary intellectual and practical knowledge to live and survive in a given civilization.

The body stands at the center of ritual activities, as it is through the body that the whole person is reached, touched, and transformed. For this reason rituals are an embodied source of knowledge, which shape and transform human behavior as they respond,<sup>3</sup> for example, to narratives of the origins or ancestors, of how the gods built the first house, reaped the first harvest, defeated the first enemies, or celebrated the first victory, thus creating a future for themselves and humankind. Rituals always create order, but also justify this order as they convey a model established by the gods and goddesses to be followed by humans, insofar as these models convey a pattern of how things ought to be. They explain what it means to be a man or a woman, why things are what they are and how they work. Consequently, rituals create traditions which foster the survival of civilization in a given context, but they can also hamper human development when the context of life changes. Frank Senn conveys some of this complex reality of rituals when he offers the following criteria defining a ritual: 1) *Formalism* as “there must be a form”; 2) *Traditionalism* as “the practice continues to be done”; 3) *Invariance* as “the practices are repeated basically the same way every time”; 4) *Rule governance*: “there are ways of doing

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<sup>3</sup> Jennings, Theodore W. “On Ritual Knowing.” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Apr., 1982). Pg. 124.

something which should be observed”; 5) *Sacred symbolism* as the practices trace back to a group’s divinities; and 6) *Performance* as “the performer of ritual self-consciously does highly symbolic actions in public.”<sup>4</sup> The very complex nature of rituals explains why the critique of rituals, discussion on rituals, and their analysis and assessment often take place in historically emotion-laden discourses. They signal the end of a world, of how things worked so far, while a new world in process of emerging struggles with the adaptation or replacement of old rituals by new ones. A good example for such a struggle over ritual today would be the civil and religious discussions related to traditional and same-sex marriage as marriage is a fundamental ritual within human life.

### **3.a.1. Rituals for good and for bad?**

Rituals often have a bad name in contemporary American society, even and perhaps particularly in the churches as they are still consciously or unconsciously entangled in the aftermath of the Reformation and the Protestant struggle over a new identity opposed to the Roman Catholic Church. In an effort to be different from Catholics, certain reforming groups either did away with traditional rituals, ridiculing or presenting them in a bad light, or at the very least changed many of them significantly. One way to demean rituals was to say, as in Mary Douglas’ words, that the term “ritual has become a bad word signifying empty conformity.”<sup>5</sup> As for Frank Senn, he emphasizes that people tend to perform rituals not because they do not believe in what they are doing, but precisely because they do.<sup>6</sup> But in this case, what remains open is the content of what people believe when they perform a

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<sup>4</sup> Senn, 349-350.

<sup>5</sup> Senn 349.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 350. “Theological commitments are embodied in ritual acts.”

ritual. As much as a critique of rituals as such is legitimate, a profitable discussion on rituals will always depend on the following question: for what kind of society and civilization are rituals mobilized in the education of human beings?

This question in turn assumes a certain awareness of the following effects of rituals: on the one hand they participate in a manipulation of human beings to conform to certain ideologies. An example of such a manipulation would be the annual military parades which rhythm the lives of people, for example, those living under a totalitarian regime. On the other hand, rituals can also contribute to a revelation of what is the real and true condition of a nation and/or of single human beings when they face, for example, a national or personal disaster, because rituals are also meant to indicate a way out of despair and give hope. Rituals can always be used for good or for bad. They can be an expression of utter oppression and destroy aspirations for liberty and justice, or they can open people to a world where freedom, justice, and peace can truly exist. In both cases rituals use body-related emotions in the expectation of arousing certain feelings and desires which either keep human beings captive in an environment that conforms to a social and cultural ideology, or feelings and desires become a means for an awareness-raising event that empowers people to resist oppression as they create a breach for liberation never envisioned so far.

### **3.a.2. How do emotions and instruction in doctrine interact?**

Rituals have an abiding and permanent function of human communication. They communicate or mediate between two major poles essential to the construction of a given society and civilization. The first is the pole of moral and social order established by the ideology guiding a clan, a people, or a nation throughout human history. The clan, people,

or nation expect the ideology to guarantee long term survival, power, and economic wellbeing. There is no way to agree with Jürgen Habermas who argues that the role of rituals has declined in modern, secularized societies because they have grown to use reasoned discourse rather than rituals to communicate truth.<sup>7</sup> Rituals have never been so powerful as in modern times, as illustrated by the Third Reich or the communist regimes still in full swing today. While David Cheal agrees with Habermas on rituals' irrational dimension due to their unverifiable nature, he nevertheless recognizes the continuing relevance for such practices given the power rituals confer to human life.<sup>8</sup> Cheal perceives better than Habermas how, through rituals, information is conveyed "dramatically, appealing to the senses, which, once engaged, offer their own unarguable definitions of reality and conviction"<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the sensual dimension of the ritual creates a unity within a social group as the critical arguments leading often to disagreement are neutralized by the emotions and feelings that cannot be argued with in a conventional manner.<sup>10</sup> Instead of having a thorough conversation about real problems, these problems are drowned in prayer or emotions, from which leaders of ritual celebrations expect to create a unity of group around the "God-given leader," which again, can be used either for good or evil.

The debate between Habermas and Cheal pinpoints the importance of the second pole proper to a ritual, which is the sensorial pole of bodily elements stimulated by music, dance, incense, alternating noise and silence, lamentations and shouts of joy, dress codes and colors, all meant to arouse certain feelings and desires, experienced by the entire group

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<sup>7</sup> Cheal, David. *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 53, No. 4, The Unique and the Shared in Religion and Society (Winter, 1992). Pg. 364.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 367.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 368.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

engaged in a ritual. It raises the question of how the emotional and the doctrinal dimensions of rituals relate to one another. But it also brings to the fore the question of political and religious leaders, royalty/government, and clergy who have always considered themselves invested with the function of mediators between the divine world and humankind.

The secularization process of modern societies did not put an end to rituals as each political system is still in need of uniting as many persons as possible around an idea, or of galvanizing a mass of people around a national project. There is no wonder that political parties use churches as platforms for pre-election events within a system that unites and reinforces both political and religious interests. The more spectacular an event, creating a sense of enjoyment and pleasure, the more the leadership can expect the participants to take away sharp memories and striking doctrinal messages. It leads back to the following fundamental questions: why do certain people enact rituals? Why are people attracted to given rituals? What do they hope to transmit through the ritual and to whom? What do people fail to recognize going into a ritual? What are the politics behind categorizations of rituals and emotions?

What must be stressed over and over again is that rituals have a function of indoctrination. At the center of this indoctrination stands the “god-willed” power of clergy and government as political leaders to mediate the ritual. This indoctrination is facilitated by the fact that it does not heavily appeal to reason, analysis, and reflection, but instead intensively uses the dimension of “mimetic learning,” which communicates knowledge through imprinting images in human consciousness via physical practices.<sup>11</sup> As Wulf

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<sup>11</sup> Wulf, Christof. “The Creation of Body Knowledge in Mimetic Processes,” in *Embodiment in Evolution and Culture*, ed. Etzelmüller, Gregor and Christian Tewes. Pg. 250.

argues, “To a great extent, cultural learning is mimetic learning...” which is a “sensory, body-based form of learning in which images, schemas and movements needed to perform actions are learned.”<sup>12</sup> Mimetic learning neutralizes an intellectual processing through the structure of a ritual, as it focuses on the exact repetition of gestures and pronouncing ritualistic words. As a result, in practicing rituals together through shared gestures and words, varied people all bring themselves into a unity of perspective and purpose<sup>13</sup> without thinking about what exactly is going on. Mimetic learning establishes a normality of things and a comfort zone which would be odd to critique. This dimension of the ritual makes it difficult to dismantle flaws of clergy and leadership, communal structures, or areas of injustice and oppression. Thus, the repetitious physical acts of a ritual generate a unity blind to flaws because they do not rely upon rational discourse.<sup>14</sup>

This neutralizing function of the ritual does not preclude mimetic learning to be a process by which a certain knowledge is communicated and created within a person via what Wulf calls “practical knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> Through culturally-determined practices, a person learns cognitively through embodied rituals how to act in certain situations.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, there is an intrinsically social aspect of ritual knowledge, connecting each person to others as they perform the same ritual, unifying them in their shared experience. Such knowledge gained via a ritual is not due to cognitive reflection before or after the realization of the ritual, but purely by enacting the ritual itself, much like training the body

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid 251.

<sup>13</sup> Cheal 369.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 371.

<sup>15</sup> Wulf 253.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 255.

for a physical feat.<sup>17</sup> It raises the question of what preserves the ritual from becoming a mechanical activity, such as for example prayer wheels typical for Asian traditions.

In a Christian context, the aspect of mechanical activity is disrupted by the proclamation of Scripture which is meant to confer to the ritual its specific meaning, not only distinguishing it from similar rituals produced by cultures, but also by always illuminating anew what is celebrated in the ritual within a given present situation. In this way, as Wulf puts it, “ritual knowledge facilitates both continuity and change,” carrying on the traditions, beliefs, and knowledge of others, but also making a re-interpretation and re-affirmation of the ritual possible.<sup>18</sup> To celebrate Mass or the Lord’s Supper at the moment of September 11, of a wedding, or a funeral will always make the rite speaking in new ways to the congregation.

A couple of practical examples can illustrate this point. The passing of the sign of peace before taking communion is a sacramental sign of unity among Christians. While one could certainly fake sincerity, the sign conveys and teaches what ought to be a reality regardless of what one thinks or of conflictual situations within a community. The sign teaches what the sacrament of the Eucharist realizes for good: the mysterious unity of all in Christ. By taking part in sacramental communion people can recognize the goal still to be reached, while the realized communion of all in the bread and cup sustains people without faltering on the way to this communion. Thus, the ritual does not turn a blind eye on human shortcomings, but brings them to the fore, offering at the same time a perspective of hope and a call to an ever-deeper communion with Christ in whom all divisions are

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<sup>17</sup> Jennings 116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 257.

overcome. The sacramental practice confirms, Sunday by Sunday, that communion among flawed human beings is not a never-to-be-reached idealistic dream, but a union which truly extends to human bodily existence in spite of all the obstacles and sin people still struggle with.

Rituals confirm that human nature is fundamentally embodied, and that ritual actions can communicate on a much more profound level than on that of a mere rational discourse. Therefore, the need to carefully evaluate Christian ritual practices is among the most important tasks the Church can do, as expressed by Senn when he writes, “the way to the soul is through the body.”<sup>19</sup> The same concern is also underlined by Nathan D. Mitchell when he points to the power of the senses as he writes “my very earliest memories of church do not arise from singing and ceremony...[but] instead to my senses of *smell*.”<sup>20</sup> Or as Mitchell argues, faith possesses bodies before it possesses our minds, leading to the recognition that faith begins with the body through the senses calling the mind to articulate this faith.<sup>21</sup> These contemporary views match the classical theological expression *fides quaerens intellectum*, “I believe in order to understand,” proper to Saint Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury.

### **3.b. Why is gendered experience of worship a necessary condition for God’s holy priesthood?**

This research on the nature of rituals and why they exist would not be complete without acknowledging and digging deeper into the fundamental relevance of the gendered

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<sup>19</sup> Senn 17. Here it is worth pointing back to the earlier discussion of *nephesh*, and therefore what we mean when we say, “soul,” i.e. the living being of Genesis 2:7.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, Nathan D. “The Amen Corner.” *Worship* 85, no. 1: January 2011. Pg. 75.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.



experience of worship. As all humans exist within a body and seek to grasp who God is and worship this God within their embodied existence, their perception of God and of beliefs relative to God will differ insofar as one is a man, a woman, or a gender variant person.<sup>22</sup> As sight or hearing are not simply the physical acts of seeing and hearing, but seeing and hearing of a man, a woman, or a gender variant person, the question arises why only, for example, a seeing and hearing of men would be the norm for all members of a given community whoever they may be. This question pinpoints the problem of the all-male clergy of many Christian churches that alone determine both sacramental practice and doctrine. Given that rituals always aim at a socialization process, the question of gender related to worship brings us back to the fundamental question; why do certain people enact rituals and what they hope to achieve with this enaction? Does the enaction of rituals vehiculate a hidden manipulation on behalf of an all-male clergy to make women agree with an only masculine perception of God and of worship? Or are both male and female perceptions and worship of God necessary for a deeper understanding of how God ought to be worshipped? In the first case, the ritual is meant to drown any rational question pertaining to gender difference, and the ritual is used to confirm and consolidate male superiority and power. In other words, the construct of a ritual makes sure that in the eyes of many it will be more efficient or appropriate when performed by a man than by a woman. In the second case, the ritual becomes the place where such an interpretation and appropriation of divine power has to be overcome, as humans dominating over other humans are contrary to God's design for humankind. In this case the purpose of genders is

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<sup>22</sup> We could add here the embodied experience of those of marginalized populations, such as African-Americans, or those with physical or mental disabilities as well.

to be in a situation of mutual assistance, called to preserve one another from considering one's gender as the unique owner and interpreter of God's saving words and actions. Whatever road one takes, rituals always crystallize an enormous power struggle between the genders, or races, or social classes as they function as mediators with the divine or God. In an effort to contain critique and maintain the socially and religiously justified traditions, the churches have elaborated two major ways of dealing with this issue from a patriarchal perspective. The first is a masculinization of emotion and feeling and the second a sexualization of female religious experience, to which we turn now.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.b.1. Masculinization of religious emotion and feeling**

The masculinization of religious emotions and feelings consists in a purification or eradication of emotions and feelings for men and women alike, as such sensations are transformed into a culturally codified, rigid, and ritualistic behavior. They are also replaced by theoretical discourse, an intellectual juggling around with doctrinal affirmations, which usually ignore historical, cultural, and socially and politically conditioned views of the Bible and the Church. The masculinization of religious emotions submits rituals to Church law, ethical regulations, and doctrinal affirmations. A summit of this development is reached when it makes rigid obedience to these norms an absolute condition for even being granted access to the ritual. One example could be the ultimate refusal of baptism or of receiving someone into the Roman Catholic Church because this person still struggles with accepting the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In Protestant churches, one could

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<sup>23</sup> Melissa Raphael argues that male dominated religions tend to masculinize emotions. In case emotion cannot be accommodated in this way, male religious discourse reduces it to a function of sexual desire. See: "Gender". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*. Oxford University Press. 2008. p. 182.

point to many examples of doctrines that separate Christians from worshipping together, like predestination or the belief in the ongoing miraculous giftings of the Holy Spirit. The decision to defer the rite is only made on the basis of a person's strict intellectual adherence or non-adherence to a given teaching. A progressive coming to an inner experience of a given dogmatic truth, guided by emotions, made of a variety of inner feelings is excluded.

This masculinization of religious emotions is inseparable from a representation of God as a male, which also matches a culturally valued attitude for boys and men to suppress their emotions and feelings, engraining in men what appears to be a natural and permanent misogynistic outlook. This culturally conditioned education is based on the idea or theory of a strict differentiation between men and women. This idea is engrained in humans already as babies. Throughout childhood and teenage years boys and girls are taught that socially unacceptable aspects of one's personality must be suppressed to find a place, position, and living within a given society. Such an education forces boys and men to suppress their emotions, as emotions are specifically identified as belonging to women, with the only exception being that of anger. It usually throws boys from early childhood into a crisis situation, creating frustration, shame, anxiety, and repression, and so they reject women consciously or unconsciously in their strive for recognition by society.<sup>24</sup> We all start out being told by others what good Christian boys or girls look like and how they behave and act. Pastors and priests are not particularly preserved by ordination from misogynistic outbursts as ordination does not change anything to their maleness. Ordination of course does not preclude the development of a young priest into a women

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<sup>24</sup> Messina, Karyne E. *Misogyny, Projective Identification, and Mentalization*. Rutledge. 2019.

and gender friendly person and to reach the state of holiness in Christ. But for others it can also happen that ordination becomes the sign of absolute differentiation with women, and even laymen, as ordination would make them closer to God by the sheer fact of their sex. Thus, the theory of a strict differentiation between men and women becomes a God-willed destiny for the purpose to represent God in the world, while women's God-willed destiny is to become mothers. Today, this theory is increasingly being brought into question as cultural expectations shift and change, and a deeper understanding of the damage wrought on men and women by the expectations of the past, especially in the area of mental health. The absolute differentiation between women and men has also become more and more implausible as more opportunities have been opened to women and they have proven time and again that they are fully capable of doing the jobs men do, and thus understandings of gender from the past are proven false. In addition to this, the experience of gender variant persons have become more public, and research into this area has complicated many traditional understandings of a sharp differentiation between man and woman. These developments have put an end to a certain exclusive representation of cultural masculinity as the God-willed, dominant force in society, and to the argument that any variance from this norm is an abnormality or inferior. With a clearer understanding of the diversity with which people may express themselves, and the research demonstrating that strict and clearly bifurcated gender roles is unhealthy for men and women, masculinity ceases to be the exclusive way to represent God in the world. The position that masculinity is the exclusive way to represent God remains a general and mostly unconscious defense mechanism imposed by society and culture on men to be absolutely different from women.

This theory of absolute difference from women pushes a great majority of men to affirm their superiority over women, expressed in the rigid power to which clings an exclusive male clergy over laity, and makes the control of women's emotions and bodies an essential aspect of what it means for male culture and society "to be a true man." Whoever critiques norms established by men or is guilty of disobedience to Church norms and authorities runs the risk of not only being excluded from community life, but most importantly from the partaking in the sacraments. Thus, the very nature of a ritual, which is to create meaning and hope in given life circumstances, is dangerously altered, as it is given the mission to ensure the submission of the Church to an all-male clergy considering itself as the highest authority on earth. Ironically, these regulations are put in place and upheld in the name of the "Mother Church", giving the impression that a woman, or women themselves make a claim for such traditions. In other words, the ritual is totally stripped of emotions and feelings in the name of a woman, the Church, as it is wholly directed towards upholding the theory of absolute differentiation between women and men.

Teresa of Avila would be a typical example of how certain male authorities used the ritual of confession to take possession of her religious experience, have it written down by her and then accommodate it to their views and benefits. In the end, most ironically, her exceptional mystical experiences were used to promote a system of being perpetually enclosed in a convent as the greatest gift a woman could make to the Church. Additionally, her works were used to confirm the Jesuits as the Roman Church's top theologians, the

only masculine Catholic religious order that never admitted the foundation of a female branch up to today.<sup>25</sup>

### **3.b.2. The sexualization of female religious experience**

The example of Teresa of Avila allows us to transition now to the second major difficulty which troubles the Christian communities in their understanding of rituals in the context of the struggle concerning gender in a worship context. This second major difficulty is the trend to downplay female religious experience and to confuse it with female emotions related to sexual desire. For a great majority of people, the name of Teresa of Avila evokes the famous sculpture of the saint executed by Bernini and exposed today in the *Santa Maria della Vittoria* Church in Rome. The representation of the saint suggests that her mystical experience of the transverberation of her heart makes Teresa look similar to a woman undergoing a sexual experience. The sexualization of female religious experience is not proper to Bernini but traces back to the struggle of the early post-apostolic Church over women in apostolic leadership. There was no better way for making women unfit for apostolic leadership or presiding over worship than to downgrade them, as the early post-apostolic tradition did, to reformed prostitutes, of whom Mary Magdalene became the figurehead. The progressive transformation of Mary Magdalene as apostle to the apostles and most prominent preacher into a reformed prostitute culminated in the creation of the medieval hagiographical *Legenda Aurea* or Golden Legend, written by the

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<sup>25</sup> Heller, Karin. "Teresa of Avila (1515-2015): A Woman between the Roman Catholic Church's Crossfire and Exaltation." <https://digitalcommons.whitworth.edu/theologyfaculty/3/>

Dominican Jacobus de Voraigne in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> The legend inspired hundreds and hundreds of artists who represented Mary Magdalene for the Church's eyes politically correct version as a sexy young woman, dedicated to prayer and penance over her sins. This perception of Mary Magdalene combining sin and female sex matched the one of typical patriarchal interpretations of Eve. It had century long devastating effects on women, on whom men could blame their sexual drives, while at the same time it conveyed to women the message to not confuse their desire for sex with spiritual experiences and to keep their sexuality in check. As for men, their sexual drives would always be covered by patriarchal cultures and societies the churches have contributed to perpetuate.

In a patriarchal system where men's superiority over women is culturally justified, whatever female experience or emotion not matching men's representations of female sexuality was exposed to be either ascribed to the devil's work, which included sexual depravity, or it was reduced to the natural functions of sexual desire. Consequently, women's religious experience was pushed into the domains where, for men, women excelled, meaning motherly functions, activities of care, and service. Thus, the second millennium made sure for women never to be seen or heard in liturgical functions, including the performance of musical repertoires written for female voices. This evolution reached a peak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century where the highly misogynistic context created by the Council of Trent in the wake of Reformation fostered the replacement of female singers in worship services by *castrati*, as women's voices were banned by what was considered a

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<sup>26</sup> Camery-Hoggart, Jerry. *Images of Mary Magdalene in Christian Traditions. A Case of Prostituted Identity*. Priscilla Papers. Vol. 18. No. 4. Fall 2004. Pgs. 19-24.

Pauline command stating that women were to be silent in the churches (1 Cor 14: 34).<sup>27</sup> It is a unique example where the dehumanization of women in a liturgical context increased a dehumanization of boys and men, forced by various circumstances to undergo a 16<sup>th</sup> century highly dangerous surgery, making social outcasts out of them. In a less violent and more contemporary context, dehumanization of men occurs when they are shamed for acting differently than what society expects from them, given that their natural behavior is perceived as lacking “manliness,” according to culturally determined standards.

### **3.b.3. What makes a truly godly priesthood?**

The previous paragraph makes it clear that an all-male priesthood or clergy hierarepresents a serious obstacle for the full realization of God’s sanctuary and final indwelling place in the midst of embodied humanity. For this reason, the religious experience of both women and men is nowhere more urgent than in the liturgical sphere. Today, the Christian churches struggle over the following question: Is an all-male priesthood to be held as being divinely revealed or is an all-male priesthood a human construct, which religiously justifies patriarchal structures and culturally accepted superiority of men over women? What makes this struggle so specific is that it is not merely an intellectual struggle over a theory, an idea, or a theological viewpoint. It is a struggle over liturgical functions or over “who can do what,” meaning: teaching, preaching, presiding over the rituals, governing the churches, and above all presiding over the Eucharistic celebration, summit

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<sup>27</sup> Pope Sixtus V was the first to re-organize the choir of St. Peter’s basilica in Rome by specifically including castrati as he issued in 1598 the bull *Cum pro nostro pastorali munere*. I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Heller, for this bleak historical fact.



of the liturgy. Therefore, a response to the question of what makes a priesthood truly godly, has to be sought by turning to the eucharistic situation of the Church.

Nothing has more obscured the meaning of this rite than the medieval intellectual debates on Christ's presence in the bread and wine, disconnecting the rite from God's living word.<sup>28</sup> If the Eucharist makes the historically unique events of Jesus' death and Resurrection ritually present, then these texts have to be read seriously in light of the present eucharistic situation in the churches. Additionally, the debates over the question of apostolic leadership granted to men alone or to both genders have always heavily focused on the narratives of the Last Supper where the community of Jesus' followers is presented as if there were only twelve men. In this specific context was also stressed the iconic argument according to which the performance of the rite requires a man, given that Jesus was and is a man, even his condition as the risen Lord. These emphases eclipsed the deep relationship between the Eucharist and the events happening during Jesus' Passion. What is striking is the dichotomy between what happens during Jesus' Passion and the present eucharistic situation, which wants to be faithful to a certain picture of the Lord's Supper.

According to all four gospels, Jesus did not die in the presence of men alone and he did not appear to men alone, while the celebration of the Eucharistic ritual has become in many churches a male stronghold, where preaching and the performance of the rite are reserved to men alone. Jesus, however, died in communion with women and men, identified as those who believe in him and who are the ones setting the stage for the next step in Jesus' existence as they take care of his broken body in the garden of the resurrection. According to John's gospel, it is to this small community of believing men

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<sup>28</sup> See: Macy and Van Ausdall, *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*.

and women that are entrusted the water, blood, and corpse of Jesus. These three realities of Jesus' body stand traditionally for the sacrament of baptism and the Eucharist through which Jesus, in communion with his believers, conveys from now on to humankind his unique life.

These women and men are composed of a very important group of Jesus' female followers. Matthew perceives as *polys gyne*/many women (Mt 26:55) and not just "a couple" as appears in the mouth of many interpreters, in order to make them look less important. Among them, three women are named which qualifies them as leaders, just as this is also the case for three men: John, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. All the historical Twelve, with the exception of John, are out of scene as they scatter. The Eucharistic situation in the Passion narratives is not that of a male stronghold presenting itself and acting as the only owners of Jesus' corpse, but the Eucharistic situation is as follows: Jesus alive or dead acts in communion with these three women and three men so that the work for which he became incarnate can be brought to full completion. Women's faith experience, just as men's faith experience, are necessary to reach this goal, given that only both working efficiently together contribute to a complete vision of the task entrusted by God to the new *Ha Adam*, in whom women and men from now on are one and reconciled in Christ (Gal 3:28; Col 1:18-20). Why is the Eucharist always referred to in terms of the Lord's Supper and nearly never in terms of what happens in Jesus' Passion? An answer to this question can be found when one considers the difference between these two eucharistic situations. In the first case the texts are written as if there were no women, and bread and wine are entrusted to twelve men. In the second case however, there is a community of

women and men to whom are entrusted Jesus' body and blood. How should we understand the message of this second Eucharistic situation?

As much as the rite gives access to Jesus' unique life, the meaning of the rite can still be obscured by a sense of magic on behalf of those who perform it and of those who are the beneficiaries of it. The "magical" understanding of the Eucharist is always trying to capture the rite's effectiveness for one's personal interests as it happens, for example, when the rite is used to affirm male superiority over women and minorities or white supremacy over people of color. Mary McAleese, former President of the Republic of Ireland, expresses this blight in the following way: "Down the 2000 year highway of Christian history came the ethereal divine beauty of the Nativity, the cruel sacrifice of the Crucifixion, the Hallelujah of the Resurrection and the rallying cry of the great commandment to love one another. But down that same highway came man-made toxins such as misogyny and homophobia to say nothing of anti-semitism with their legacy of damaged and wasted lives and deeply embedded institutional dysfunction."<sup>29</sup> The rite of the Eucharist does not exist for the rite itself, nor for the satisfaction of an elite, nor to fulfil mere personal interests. The Eucharistic ritual only exists for establishing all human beings in an everlasting community of life with God and among themselves. More than ever both female and male voices are necessary to make such a life community possible, when it comes up to the interpretation of scriptures, the elaboration of Christian theology in light of the challenges of each time period, and the pastoral care for people and God's creation.

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<sup>29</sup> Speech of Mary McAleese given at the Voices of Faith International Women's Day Conference on 08 March 2018 at the Jesuit Curia, Rome. <https://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Full-Text-of-Mary-McAleese's-Speech-given-at-the-Voices-of-Faith-International-Women's-Day-Conference-on-08-March-2018-at-the-Jesuit-Curia.pdf>

An all-male priesthood can only give a male perspective on such matters, and is therefore inherently limited. A house built only by men cannot make everyone feel welcome. The Eucharist is by nature a ritual meant to make everyone welcome. This affirmation does not preclude the necessity of Church discipline, for a house without a certain order risks to become chaotic and to disappear. Therefore, a truly godly priesthood can only be a priesthood that brings the diverse embodied voices of all people equally to the table. The Eucharistic ritual only exists for the completion of God's sanctuary on earth and in heaven, which neither men nor women alone can achieve, but requires the input of both, women and men. This fact makes the embodied and gendered experience a necessary condition for God's holy and whole priesthood.

### **3.c. When human worship becomes sacred architecture and space**

The previous section has brought to the fore the deep interconnection between a godly priesthood and the construction, as well as running, of a house. Or to put it in the words of James White, "it should not surprise us that a religion whose fundamental doctrine is the incarnation should take space seriously in its worship."<sup>30</sup> While John 4 makes it clear that Christian worship is "in spirit and truth" anywhere and under any circumstances, it does not follow that the setting of worship does not matter. The arts of organizing space and of architecture are part of whatever form human and religious life take. This affirmation is also true for Christianity and Christian worship,<sup>31</sup> where architectural spaces and the arts have always been intentionally chosen for their capacity to contribute in their

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<sup>30</sup> White, James. *Introduction to Christian Worship*. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN: 2000. Pg. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 82.

ways to the proclamation of the gospel message. Both organizing a space and architecture raise the question of what exactly makes a profane space into a sacred place and why do sacred places exist?

### **3.c.1. Why are sacred spaces necessary?**

In a Christian context, what makes an architectural space “sacred” is the act of setting it apart for the public worship of God. To argue that the whole world is sacred is accurate, however, there have always been places of special importance, recognized as “set apart,” since humanity exists. Christianity and Christians are not different, and even took advantage of antique pagan sites and sanctuaries and integrated them into their own sacred buildings. Although the Reformation started out with a strong rejection of prestigious buildings and the arts, many churches continued to put emphasis on what will become a high church liturgical setting.<sup>32</sup>

Sacred spaces are human responses to a human experience of the divine, such as Jacob’s dream of a *sullam*, or stepladder, reaching into heaven that leads him to give the name of Bethel or house of God to the location where he slept (Gen 28:10-22). The message conveyed by the dream showing the architectural structure of a ziggurat is fundamentally associated with Jacob’s fully embodied existence and calling to become a great nation. It is up to him to contribute to the realization of this house of God by becoming a father in fulfilment of God’s promise to his ancestors Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. Whenever this biblical interconnection between the house of God and the human embodied

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<sup>32</sup> Hedges, Paul M. “Remembering and the Creation of Sacred Place: Glastonbury, Anglican Christian Theology, and Identity.” *Implicit Religion*, 17 no 3 Sep 2014. Pg. 300. See also: Lang, Uwe Michael. “What Makes Architecture “Sacred”?” *Logos*, 17 no 4 Fall 2014. Pg. 55.

existence is dismantled, the architectural message loses its meaning. When any hall or classroom without modification is considered just as fine to gather in worship as the church, it profoundly alters the understanding of a church, as a community set apart by God, a *quahal* and *ekklesia* called out of the nations to be God's particular people. It initiates and fosters a progressive secularization process of a church community.

Such a perception of space can work out for good or for bad. It is for good when it allows a community to become aware of inner corruption and desire for healing as is the case when God leads Israel in the wilderness to be healed from her idols (Hos 2:14), or into pagan territory such as Babylon, creating a deep inner desire for a return from Exile and better sense of what it means to be at home and to be a home. But it can also lead to a bad outcome when worship is watered down to a more and more secular spectacle or entertainment. In this case, the specific identity of God's people gets altered, sometimes to the point of getting lost. Today, this phenomenon is expressed by "the Nones," people with no religious affiliation, but who have not completely rejected the idea of God or a spiritual dimension of the human being. Roughly one-fifth of Americans and one-third of young Americans fall into this category and their number is growing.<sup>33</sup> It underlines the high importance of sacred space as a foundational reminder and support for upholding one's identity as people of God, precisely because the human being lives in a body.

Space is also always made sacred insofar as worship sets human beings apart in time and brings them into the time and space of the gods, the divine or God. However, as underlined by Cardinal Ratzinger, worship also corresponds to a space and time "already

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<sup>33</sup> See: Peters, Nathaniel. *The Rise of the Nones*. Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute. August, 2019. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/08/53246/>

and not yet.”<sup>34</sup> Humanity exists in a world where the sacred is taking hold over all the earth, yet it is still in need of sacred places and actions because the transformation of all space being fully sacralized is not complete. In other words, there is still a need of sacramentality or of a mediation between heaven and earth, this time and God’s time, God and humankind.

From there it follows that sacred architecture should communicate significant truths about God to the congregants who gather in this space and in which they experience a sacred time while the liturgy unfolds.<sup>35</sup> Sacred space and the way one fills up sacred time are crucial for the shaping, development and upholding of one’s specific identity. It cannot be stressed enough how contemporary Christianity, especially evangelicalism, has tended to downplay or reject notions that architectural design and liturgical times have spiritual significance.<sup>36</sup> The decline of a great majority of once culturally prominent churches is certainly not alien to such a development. But it also explains a strong trend in favor of very traditional forms of worship, as in the case of the Roman Catholic Church.

The emphasis on architecture in evangelical circles has typically been pragmatic, concerned purely with the functional aspects of a space.<sup>37</sup> Modern churches, as observed by the architect Paul Goldberger, are designed to be comfortable and accessible, with little concern for the “mystery and otherworldliness” represented by church buildings of earlier

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid 57.

<sup>35</sup> Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, NY: 1959. Pg. 26. Eliade argues that all sacred spaces imply a hierophany or irruption of the divine into the world.

<sup>36</sup> Mouw, Richard J. *Crux*, 52 no 2 Sum 2016, pg. 5., and Rev. 21.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid pg. 6.

ages.<sup>38</sup> From the perspective of more traditional, highly liturgical churches, the church building is “the place where the members are formed and the Mystical Body of Christ is developed; and it is a symbol signifying this Mystical Body,” as for example, the Gothic style of the high middle ages, built in a cruciform shape.<sup>39</sup> And last, but not least, sacred spaces and sacred times are necessary insofar as they teach human beings how to transcend space and time in order to live, to move, and to speak in the presence of very often terrifying, unknown and unpredictable divinities, including the Christian God.

### **3.c.2. Sacred Spaces and Power Dynamics**

Sacred spaces and sacred times always introduce humans to power dynamics and therefore, to an experience which affects their entire being, their bodies, mind, soul, and heart. In all religious traditions sacred spaces first orient human bodies vertically towards God, emphasizing the divine or supernatural power. Second, they orient bodies horizontally, highlighting a social power and solidarity between each other. Third, there is a personal power, or the feeling of spiritual empowerment that one experiences as a result of encountering the divine.<sup>40</sup> These power dynamics are always at work, either bringing people together or creating distinctions, promoting the experience of the divine, or smothering it. Ideally, sacred spaces will be used to balance these dynamics according to the theological commitments of the tradition that builds them.

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<sup>38</sup> Goldberger, Paul. “The Gospel of Church Architecture, Revised.” *New York Times*, April 20, 1995.

<sup>39</sup> Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. Commemorative Edition. Ignatius Press. 2018. 76-87.

<sup>40</sup> Kilde, Jeanne Helgren. *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY: 2008. Pg. 4.



A church with a higher view of ordained ministry may want to create a distinction between clergy and congregation with an elevated or screened off sanctuary, emphasizing the importance of the clergy's liturgical actions. On the other hand, if the church has also a commitment to the priesthood of all believers, the space must be constructed in such a way that all people are involved in the liturgy, interacting with each other and with clergy alike.

But the major question will be of how God's power becomes visible and audible in such a setting. As already pinpointed in a previous chapter, many churches have gone the road to use male clergy as the best, highest, and only organ of making God both visible and audible. Other churches, as for example the Quakers or Holiness churches, leave it up to any in the congregation to make their voices heard in God's name.

A third way of making God's power visible and audible is a combination of giving to both clergy and laity distinctive roles. Such is, for example, the case for Eastern Orthodox churches where the iconostasis or separation between the space reserved to the clergy and the laity, usually decorated with icons, symbolizes the gate to heaven. The clergy going in and out during the liturgy mediates God's presence between heaven and earth while the people take part in this "divine liturgy" through the choir and the congregation calling upon and responding to one another. This form is also similar to the Roman Catholic ways of envisioning the liturgy. In a Roman Catholic setting, too, clergy, the choir, and the congregation are in dialogue with one another according to a codified order. The *ordinarium* are the invariable parts of hymnic prayers at any mass, while the *proprium* are entrance hymns, songs, and verses of psalms that change at each celebration. All these parts are meant to vehiculate biblical and theological values and contents which

enlighten one another, as they circulate between the priest, the cantor, the choir, and the congregation. Practices that were designed with the same intention can be found in Anglican or liturgically high church Protestant churches as well.

What is common to all these three models is the fact that the dynamics of sacred architectural space and time periods shape people into a certain kind of people. Sacred space, time, and ritual never leave a person unchanged, given the power-laden nature of any liturgy. Consequently, according to the more-or-less biblical and theological content vehiculated during the celebrations, people are shaped into more-or-less biblically and theologically informed members of a community.

### **3.c.3. Principles of participatory Inclusivity of the Liturgy**

A traditional definition of prayer sees in prayer an elevation of the soul to God.<sup>41</sup> Such an act can happen in the secret of one's room as well as during a collective worship service. But a liturgy will always be more than prayer as perceived in this definition, given that the liturgy mobilizes one's personal entire embodied existence not only within a local community, but also within a church which extends worldwide. For this reason, personal prayer or devotion on a sunny day on the beach or in the mountains can never replace a liturgy.

This fact raises a great variety of questions of how to enact a liturgy inclusive of all who take part in it. How should a community deal with the desires and wishes based on many personal preferences for different styles in celebration, preaching, music, and expressions of human experience within a liturgy? Should there be a specific *leitmotiv* for

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<sup>41</sup> De Sales, St. Frances. *The Elevation of the Soul to God by Prayer and the Sacraments*. Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish, MT: 2010.

each celebration? How should moments of proclaiming God's Word and listening to God's Word interact with one another? How can the words pronounced by a single person create meaning for words right afterwards uttered by the entire congregation? What should be repeated in order to be remembered throughout an entire celebration and once the celebration is over? What is the function of music and musicians within a celebration? Which intensity should be given to it or to them? Should their performance convene a certain understanding of God's word or should it create an inner emotion or feeling of happiness? Quite often evangelical celebrations shaped by U.S. culture provide an implicit model for each celebration. Is this model the only possible one? Should liturgy only include elements accessible to multiple types of congregants, stripped of whatever particularity? Or what should one think about a liturgy which blends Gregorian chant, Byzantine, Russian court music, jazz, European 19<sup>th</sup> century music, African and Asian music, and artistic expressions?

During the last two hundred years two major understandings of the liturgy pervaded and continue to pervade the main Christian denominations.<sup>42</sup> The first perceives the liturgy as a work of the Church where the clergy is invested with an active role and represents the "teaching Church," while the congregation or lay persons are the "learning Church," as they have a passive role of listening, obeying, and receiving a God-willed instruction and sacramental action. In the Roman Catholic tradition in particular, such an understanding of the liturgy puts heavy emphasis on the exact fulfilment of rites by which the clergy makes

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<sup>42</sup> See: Heller, Karin, 'Between *Ressourcement* and *Aggiornamento*. Liturgical Movements in the Context of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Church of France'. In: *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe*. Ed. By Pancratius Cornelis Beentjes. Tilburg Theological Studies. Vol. 3. 2009. Pg. 151-164.

God's invisible grace visible. The second understanding of the liturgy was fostered in the wake of the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>43</sup> This understanding perceives the liturgy as the *Mysterium Paschalis* or Paschal Mystery, where Christ, the High priest, and his Body, the Church, act together. The second Vatican Council coined the expression of a "full, conscious and active participation of the laity" in the celebration of the liturgy,<sup>44</sup> made possible by the use of vernacular language at all liturgical celebrations instead of Latin. It also restored the 4<sup>th</sup> century rite where clergy and congregation faced one another in a posture of dialogue during the celebration.<sup>45</sup> While in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Reformation had already emphasized Scripture as the unconditional source for the life of Christian communities, the Roman Catholic Church rediscovered with the second Vatican Council the life-giving interaction between God's word and the ritual. It compelled the Church authorities to provide easy access to Sacred Scripture to all the Christian faithful.<sup>46</sup>

The implementation of the liturgical reform during the years and decades following the Council crystallized strong resentments over the sudden disappearance of the Latin language and ritual on behalf of a minority of Roman Catholics. It led in 1988 to the excommunication of four bishops, ordained by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, without the consent of the Vatican authorities as they rejected the teachings of the Second Vatican

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> See also:

[http://www.sacredarchitecture.org/articles/louis\\_bouyer\\_and\\_church\\_architecture/](http://www.sacredarchitecture.org/articles/louis_bouyer_and_church_architecture/) (last access: November 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 21-22. The Anglican churches of which I am a part were also influenced by Vatican II and have regularly gone through their own liturgical revisions to reach similar ends, even if with sometimes mixed results.

Council. The celebration of mass according to the ritual of Pope Pius V utterly crystallized Archbishop Lefebvre's disagreements. This ritual is in fact the ritual of the Tridentine Mass promulgated on July 14, 1570 in the wake of Council of Trent, convened in response to the Reformation. Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of the four bishops in 2009, while all the institutions belonging to the movement founded by Archbishop Lefebvre cannot exercise any ministry in the name of the Roman Catholic Church as long as they refuse the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and refuse to recognize as popes all those elected after pope Pius XII who died in 1959.<sup>47</sup>

This example demonstrates how a ritual is much more than ritual, as it directs and shapes the doctrinal self-understanding of the nature of the Church.<sup>48</sup> This self-understanding recalls what stands at the center of this research, i.e. the absolute interconnection of worship and the embodied existence, be it the one of a single person or of a collective community. In other words, the sacramental life of the Church, which finds its summit in the liturgy, bears witness to a union (or disunion) of all those who confess their faith in Christ Jesus. It is in the liturgy, lived out in each person's fully embodied existence as well as in the fully embodied existence of the entire Church, that the union of

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<sup>47</sup> See : [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20090310\\_remissione-scomunica.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090310_remissione-scomunica.html) . The Congregation of Mary Immaculate Queen living in Spokane, WA, belongs to this movement. It runs Saint Michael's Academy, in association with St. Michael's Traditional "Catholic" parish. In 2005 Sr. Mary Eucharista came to accept Pope Benedict XVI upon his election and left the community together with 14 other sisters. In 2007 they were received in the Roman Catholic Church by Bishop Skylstad, while their religious community was approved under the name of Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Church in 2008. Today they run the Immaculate Heart Retreat Center in Spokane, WA.

<sup>48</sup> This can be concisely exemplified by the Early Church formulation of *lex credendi, lex orandi*, or "the law of belief is the law of prayer", still valid for the Eastern Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican traditions. Essentially, what we pray is what we believe, and what we believe, we pray, and as such, rituals are anything but arbitrary or inconsequential!

Christ with the Church and with all her members is made visible. For this reason, it is not so much appropriate to speak of the Lord's Supper or mass as the sacrament of the Eucharist, but rather of the sacrament of the Unity of the Church.<sup>49</sup>

In the understanding of the Second Vatican Council, as formulated by Cardinal Lustiger, the Christian liturgy "is a historical act as a time and place of redemption, of salvation, and God's presence; it is an act in which Christ's disciples participate in his unique history."<sup>50</sup> For this reason neither clergy nor the faithful are the owners of the liturgy, as actors and spectators would be the creators of a spectacle. Both clergy and faithful are at work with God in view of the redemption of humankind as illustrated by the events recorded by the Gospel of John at Jesus' crucifixion: it is to a community of men and women who are Jesus' believers and followers, that Jesus entrusts his broken body and blood for their own good and the good of all humankind. Neither the priest, nor the community, nor church musicians are there to display themselves during the liturgy. Preaching, teaching, praying, music, paintings, sculptures, stained-glass windows, moving within the sacred space, standing, kneeling or sitting do not have the function of entertainment and embellishment, but they are an integral part of the liturgy. It means that their function is to contribute in their specific ways to proclaim and celebrate the living and life-giving word of God, and therefore are to be handled with biblical and theological thoughtfulness.

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<sup>49</sup> See: Kasper, Cardinal Walter. *Sacrament of Unity. The Eucharist and the Church*. Crossroad Publishing, New York, NY, 2005: Chapter VI.

<sup>50</sup> Lustiger, Jean-Marie. *Choosing God, Chosen by God: Conversations with Jean Marie Cardinal Lustiger*. San Francisco. Ignatius Press. 1991. Pg. 288.

These two understandings of the liturgy continue to be at war with one another in the Roman Catholic Church today, as well as in the Protestant and evangelical churches. They bring to the fore some guiding principles for determining when a liturgy meets the goals for which it was entrusted by God to his/her people or when it falls short. These principles can be summarized as follows:

A participatory inclusivity of the liturgy stands or falls at the point at which one desires to know God, to grasp the meaning of God's Word, or conversely to establish a screen or protection between God's word and oneself. It also stands or falls with the willingness one has to use the liturgy for one's self-celebration, collectively or individually.

The liturgy is never something that is about us. If liturgy becomes about us, then it becomes divisive, as no human person, culture, or community can completely express God's fullness. Additionally, as humans we will always prefer certain humans over others to live and to celebrate with, thus creating all kinds of exclusion. Therefore, the liturgy is always about God's desire to become present in us and to make his/her home in us. In this way, the construction of a sanctuary truly pleasing to God continues to be the central purpose of a Christian liturgy. Whenever the liturgy drifts away from this purpose, it becomes misdirect and is off target.

Humankind's vocation is not to make the God and Father of all present in the material world through liturgical actions and a promotion of God's own unique representatives, entitled to lead all creation to worship him. Rather, humankind's vocation is to become throughout history the sanctuary into which it is pleasing to God to come down and dwell in ever.

Thus, the liturgy is fundamentally inclusive of diversity in understanding God's word in any human language and culture, in every new situation of a given society. Century by century, the liturgy manifests God's will for all to celebrate the God who brought us out of Egypt to the promised land, out of slavery to the freedom of God's children. It is a common action that binds the God of Abraham and Rebekah, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Jesus, Mary and Mary Magdalene together without any distinction of nation, race, culture, and language (Rev 7:1-14). The liturgy expresses the very nature of the Church, which is to be a *qahal*, an *ekklesia*, an assembly *called out* by God among the nations and "brought together" to reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

This fundamentally biblical and theological view entitles all church communities to reflect the diversity of God's people in their practices of worship, as these journeys out of slavery to God's freedom, individually and collectively, will be always different from one another in space and time. No single church will ever express that multiplicity in full. If the only persons seen in a church reading the scriptures, presiding over the Eucharist, speaking, or singing are always white or male, then God's word will always be only understood in such a perspective, giving the illusion that only white males were meant to be on this journey. Any worship practices which exclusively seek to engage either the mind, or the emotions, or same categories of persons, will ultimately drift away from the purpose for which the liturgy was entrusted by God to Israel and by Jesus to the community of believers. Therefore, the Christian communities should strive for ways bringing their own diverse voices to the table as well as the voices of Christians living in other cultures and situations. As much as God's word will not be complete without all of humankind's



answers to it, the liturgy will not be complete without all of what it takes to prepare for God a dwelling place entirely pleasing to him/her in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Therefore, the liturgy is above all God's proper action of making him/herself visible to God's people in the same way as God creates the universe, leads the patriarchs and matriarchs living a nomadic life style, guides Israel through the wilderness, convenes his/her people on Mount Sinai, at the Passover Festival or at the Lord's table, on Mount Golgotha and in the garden of the resurrection. Whatever the preaching, teaching and music style one adopts, they will only create a unity among the believers as long as they contribute to an always deeper understanding of God's words on this journey to the heavenly Jerusalem and do not water down God's word or drown it in music, noise, flowers, decorations, flashes, oratory effects, and mere moralistic exhortations.

What Jesus of Nazareth revealed by his Incarnation is the unique way by which one becomes such a sanctuary throughout an embodied human existence. There is no other way than the one which consists in receiving God's word day by day in one's embodied existence. The unique purpose of God's word given together with God's Spirit is to lead us into Jesus' own death and resurrection, which ultimately make us one with him or "bones of his bones and flesh of his flesh". The liturgy is meant to sustain us in our journey or move from death to life, and not from materiality to immateriality. In this way, the liturgy is given to us as an anticipation of our eschatological fulfilment whatever our personal journey may be. It is the fulfilment in our bodies of what Christian hope still expects.

## Conclusion

Luke Timothy Johnson's book, *The Revelatory Body*, first sparked my interest for engaging in this research and had a major influence for bringing it to a conclusion. The idea of how we come to know God through our bodies is simply incredible, and so is also God's design to transform all creation into a temple or sanctuary that God elects as his/her dwelling place. The climax of divine revelation in creation is humanity, those who without any distinction as to sex, status, and race are created in the embodied image of God, none more centrally than Jesus Christ, the very God in human flesh.<sup>1</sup>

The seeds of this research were sown as I experienced different traditions of Christian worship and attitudes towards the body. I started noticing that there were significant relationships between the body and worship. Not only did my own experience vary positively or negatively as I participated in these differing liturgical forms, but I began to wonder if there were objective principles of worship. Progressively I became aware of the fact that different forms of worship flowed out of many representations of who God is and what it means to be human, but what struck me most was the view of persons who officiated and the postures they took for doing so, as it made visible something about how they thought of God, the church, or humankind. The way they engaged in worship with their bodies led me to other questions such as how our environment, the space where worship unfolds, affect us. Or, how do people unlike me, such as women or whoever

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<sup>1</sup> This point is the basic premise of Luke Timothy Johnson's book, *The Revelatory Body*. The author argues in favor of a discernment of God's Spirit through the body as an essential task for theology too often perceived as a deductive science. It is through human bodily experience that theology becomes faithful as a discourse not just about God but to and with God. Pgs. 1-3.

encounters the experience of racism or whatever other form of oppression, engage in worship?

The powerful arguments of Richard J. Middleton that creation was designed to be a holy temple for God, and a subsequent understanding of our vocation as human beings called to build and take care of a sanctuary according to God's instructions, had a significant impact upon my understanding of the body in the Christian Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> I came to the following conclusion: if the body is so central to the way we perceive the world and participate in its life and development, then to believe that our understanding and practice of worship is entirely up to preference, cultural pressures, or pragmatic concerns is at best theologically and spiritually naïve.

A thin or inaccurate theological approach of what it means to live in a body will have deleterious effects on the Christian faith, particularly as it will have an impact on how one views the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth. The body of Jesus Christ was a real, human body. In the body of Jesus of Nazareth, God was revealed in an absolutely unique way, a manner that humankind could experience for about thirty years and would never experience in the same way again. But the Incarnation left an everlasting fingerprint on earth insofar as God chose a human body to make him/herself visible, audible, and tangible. From now on this unique revelation made each-and-every human body worthy of becoming God's dwelling place. It explains why, since its inception, Christianity came to be identified with charity, with all those works that have at their center the deep care for the human being whoever they may be. It makes of Christian charity an embodiment in Jesus, Incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the cornerstone of

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<sup>2</sup> Gen 2: 8.15; Ex 25:8; Middleton, pgs. 81-84.

Christian worship and the driving force for building a sanctuary of living stones as dwelling place truly pleasing to God. From now on, it will never be enough to speak in terms of spirituality and worship without including our bodily experiences, as such talk would undermine the real humanity of Jesus Christ, reducing it to abstraction even though a full-throated affirmation of His humanity may be proclaimed.

Frank C. Senn is correct when he asserts that, “There is no way for worship to be more relevant to people or to foster their active participation than by engaging them bodily in liturgical rites.”<sup>3</sup> All human beings are in need of being healed from their multiple fractures, internal divisions, divided heart, prerogatives of sex, status, and race (Gal 3:28), which create for all highly detrimental, oppressive, and unjust structures. Such sinful structures are meant to be overcome by the structures which characterize God’s sanctuary and dwelling place. To reach this goal, all humankind is in need to be formed anew holistically. Trying to center the faith on anything that does not embrace that holistic reality, will inevitably be but a weak reflection of what faith lived out in a human existence could be, and what God intends human beings to be.

These last two sentences highlight in a general way the more specific benefits I received by engaging in this research project. Since my first awakening to the important interconnection between the human body and worship, the progress I made through this research can be summarized in a more detailed way as follows.

First, before engaging in this research I took a dualistic worldview of Christianity for granted. This worldview was the normal mode of being, apparently embraced by all Christians. It was and still is expressed by the classical and traditional dualistic view of

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<sup>3</sup> Senn, xii.

human makeup, meaning a body and a soul. In this worldview the soul is often perceived, explicitly or implicitly, as more important and superior to the body, which in turn leads to putting strong emphasis on “saving people by bringing them to Jesus.” Once these people “accept Jesus into their hearts,” the goal is reached, and one moves on to bringing other people to Jesus. In this race for “saving people’s souls,” the scriptural worship-related affirmations typical for Amos, Isaiah, and Jesus, would usually go unnoticed or be swept under the rug (Am. 5: 21-27; Is 1:11-31; Mt 5:21-25). The question of an incompatibility between a truly godly worship and a lifestyle where questions of social justice were ignored, would barely be raised.

This research allowed me to perceive more in depth why many of contemporary Christianity’s worship practices fail to adequately affirm the centrality of the body. It is striking how powerfully Christians can be shaped by the performance of rituals in a way that minimizes the human embodied existence. But it also explains the shallowness of many liturgies given the ignorance about a godly liturgy going hand in hand with a lifestyle driven by human justice and righteousness.

Second, the more I delved into this research, the more I became aware of the fact that the body standing at the center of this research was only a male body. The shift from an all-male body to a great diversity of human bodies, including the female body, proved to be a difficult one. It allowed me to perceive the power of a certain instinctive belief system that imposes on someone something to be true without any further consideration. I recognized that to be educated in the experience of other ways of being was necessary for me, especially as I approach ordination to the priesthood. Therefore, it is my intention to engage in an in-depth study of Megan DeFranza’s book entitled *Sex Difference in Christian*

*Theology: Male, Female and Intersex in the Image of God* (2015) as it grapples with some of these pressing questions of gender which will surely come up in my future ministry.

Third, the new perspectives created by the discovery of the deep interconnection between genders and worship led me to another benefit, which was to raise questions about how to effectively communicate my research to other people. The more my investigations reshaped and deepened my own understanding of the body, strengthened my commitment to take human experience seriously as a way to understand rituals theologically, the more I also perceived the necessity for engaging entire congregations in a wider conversation about a theological integration of the body into theological thinking about worship. Whenever this deep theological association of body and worship is narrowed down to feelings, we run the risk of self-limiting ourselves from experiencing God more fully. If a liturgy uses the body minimally, it will be a biblically and theologically weak liturgy; if a church follows the practice of a very narrow selection of people considered as the only actors of the liturgy, it is not fully embracing the universality of Christ's Incarnation of which the purpose is to transform all people into becoming a sanctuary for the triune God.

It is my hope that this thesis could be a starting point for other people to consider or re-consider the importance of a renewed understanding of the body in relation to our practices of worship and spiritual devotion. But what seems to me even more crucial is to create practical worship opportunities where the theological conclusion to which I came are practically lived out and can be practically met with a positive reaction.

Fourth, the more I made progress in this research, the more I could not attend worship as I did before. This research made me experience from the inside how powerful and transformative worship and the liturgy can be. I was stunned to discover how human

sciences provided a much more in-depth approach to ritualistic practices in support of a better theological understanding than could be expected from the churches and confessional teachings. As follow up to this new experience I want to delve more deeply into the theology of the priesthood by taking into account the two following questions: how exactly, if at all, does a pastor represent Christ and the Church, and what are the transforming effects on a community when its leadership represents better the great diversity of humankind?

This research project has enabled me to better answer the larger question of what it means to be human. The lens I have taken to answer this question has brought me to the conclusion that humans are more than their bodies, while being human never allows for the exclusion of the body. From there it follows that differences in ethnicity, gender, age, class, or physical ability, can yield a more powerful understanding not only of our neighbor but of God as well, given that the study of the body's theological significance and its practical implementation can be identified as a response to the two great commandments declared by Jesus to be one.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matt. 22:36-40.

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