
Bodies and Liturgy

A. Bodies Created to Worship God

This is an introductory journey in liturgy. As such, we will cover many of the basics of liturgics and the repertoire of liturgical rites. However, our journey will proceed, as far as possible, from the perspective of the human body engaged in acts of worship. The premise is that we have nothing else with which to worship God than our bodily selves. This is something that should be self-evident, but worship as a bodily act hasn't been given a great deal of attention. Most of us, especially Westerners, think of ourselves as minds with a body attached. Our religion, too, is primarily a matter of thought and feeling rather than bodily actions. In fact, we tend to look down on those whose religion is just "going through the motions," forgetting that we must start somewhere—such as getting out of bed on Sunday morning to go to church. In a time when more and more people in Western societies get out of bed on Sunday morning to go jogging or biking or to take their kids to soccer practice because they generally find worship boring and unengaging, perhaps we need to give some attention to the role of the body in worship.

Many of us need to begin giving some attention to the body. Unless we are athletes or singers or make our living by using our bodies, we don't pay a lot of attention to our bodies until we are sick. This is what happened to me. After an adult lifetime of not giving much attention to my body, my need to focus on my body hit me squarely in the solar plexus when I was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2006. After having some of my colon surgically removed and spending nearly a year on chemotherapy, I became attentive to every little thing happening to my body, both during chemotherapy and in the rehabilitation that followed. I began practicing yoga at the age of sixty-five. It did wonders for my flexibility, overall strength, sense of balance, and ability to concentrate. I think we can learn a lot about our bodies and our lives from yoga practice. An ancient Indian form of wisdom that is validated by many strains of modern Western science (e.g., anatomy, neuroscience, and psychology) needs to be given respectful attention if we want to understand more about mind-body relationships.

The Human Body

With these introductory remarks out of the way, let me begin by going back to the beginning—back to the creation story from Gen. 2. The ground was dry, “but a stream would rise up from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (2:6-7, NRSV).

We are creatures of the earth. That's the most fundamental thing that can be said about human beings, even in Genesis. We are living, breathing bodies composed of the earth's chemical elements. It was necessary to water the ground before we could be fashioned by our Creator from the dirt. The Lord God needed to make clay. Moreover, without water no life form as we know it is possible. Water makes up 70-85 percent of our physical being. Put another way, the human body is a container that collects and stores H₂O. Therefore, it isn't surprising that most of a human body's mass is oxygen. Carbon, the basic unit for organic molecules, comes in second. Ninety-nine percent of the mass

of the human body is made up of just six elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. Body composition may also be analyzed in terms of molecular type: water, protein, connective tissue, fats (or lipids), apatite (in bones), carbohydrates (such as glycogen and glucose), and DNA. In terms of tissue type, the body may be broken down into water, fat, muscle, bone, and so on. In terms of cell type, the body contains hundreds of different types of cells, but notably, the largest *number* of cells contained in a human body (though not the largest mass of cells) consists not of human cells but of bacterial cells residing in the human gastrointestinal tract. Our bodies host other living organisms—some good, some bad. The body operates with ten different but interrelated systems: skeletal, muscular, cardiovascular, digestive, endocrine (glands), nervous, respiratory, immune/lymphatic, reproductive (different in men and women), and integumentary (skin, hair, nails, and exocrine glands). What's more, we have five sense organs by which we receive information from outside of ourselves: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

The reader probably did not expect a study on liturgy to begin with a lesson in biochemistry and anatomy. But I want to emphasize that human beings are physical bodies; that's how God created us. There is nothing in the story of the creation of the human that suggests that man (Adam) is composed of body and soul. Rather, the human being is a living body. Yahweh breathed into Adam “the breath of life” (*nishmat chaim*), and Adam became “a living being” (*nefesh chaim*). Life springs directly from God as the Lord God breathes into the lifeless human body he has shaped from the ground and the ground water that rose up in the desert just before man's creation. We receive God's spirit (*ruach*) as our animating energy. We are connected with God through the breath, and we are intended to be in communion/communication with God.

Mind Over Matter

If our purpose on the earth is to take care of the garden of the Lord and serve God, we have nothing other than our bodies with which to

serve and worship God. The apostle Paul says as much when he writes to the Romans, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1, NRSV). Yet we Christians (Catholic as well as Protestant) are heirs of a post-Reformation rationalism that teaches we worship God primarily with our minds. Our worship continues to be affected by this rationalism. We gather in buildings arranged like classrooms, with all of the benches facing in one direction. We come to attention when the bell rings and listen to a speaker expounding texts.

Western philosophy, at least since René Descartes, has focused primarily on only one part of the body: the mind. Descartes’s philosophic method rejects all probable knowledge and trusts only what can be completely known without being doubted. Since the only thing Descartes could be absolutely certain of was that he was able to think, he concluded, *Cogito ergo sum*—“I think, therefore I am”—in his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Thinking is a conscious act that involves a formal process, like mathematics. Mathematics can be certain, like the act of consciously thinking. Following Galileo before him, Descartes helped to lay the foundation for the construction of the objective or “disinterested” sciences, which have yielded much of the knowledge and many of the technologies that are commonplace today in Western culture and in all of the places to which it is imported. The chemical table of the elements, immunization vaccines, automobiles, computers, and close-up images of the planet are all things we have come to depend upon and take for granted. They emerged from the bold approach of experimentation developed by the objective sciences.

Yet these sciences consistently overlook our ordinary, everyday experience of the world around us, which is necessarily subjective, necessarily relative to our own place in the range of things, and necessarily related to our own particular desires, tastes, and concerns. At least through environmental and psychological sciences we are learning again that human life and the world’s life are intertwined. We are bodies in the world, and we are affected by what happens in nature, whether it is day or night and whether there is sunlight or rain, heat

or cold. We recognize that even the scientist cannot make himself or herself as value-free as he or she would like to think. The scientist is also affected by the environment in which he lives and the needs and conditions of her own body.

Phenomenology and the Embodied Mind

The philosophy of phenomenology, first taught by Edmund Husserl in the first half of the twentieth century, moved away from the mathematically-based sciences (founded by Galileo and Descartes) in an effort to describe as nearly as possible the way in which the world makes itself known to our awareness—that is, the way we experience things through our senses. Husserl was followed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who writes, “All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.”¹

The physical body came to play an important role in the philosophies of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. For Husserl the “self” is a transcendent ego separated from the phenomena that it studies, including the body. But for Merleau-Ponty the self is the body. Husserl would say, “I have a body” (implying a disconnection from the body), while Merleau-Ponty would say, “I am a body” (this body is me). Moreover, Merleau-Ponty taught that the body is fundamental to all experience. The body is not a stationary phenomenon; it takes a stand in the world by always being in motion (even if only breathing). When sitting in a concert or lecture hall or sports stadium, I turn my head or move my entire body to get a better view. When I extend an arm and wave a hand to get the attention of a friend, I am doing more than flexing a set of muscles; I am projecting myself toward someone else. By moving my body, I cause the world to exist for me. Therefore the body is more than a collection of physical systems; it is how I express myself and communicate with others, including God.

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), viii.

The philosopher David Abram writes in *The Spell of the Sensuous*:

This breathing body, as it experiences and inhabits the world, is very different from that objectified body diagrammed in physiology textbooks, with its separate “systems” (the circulatory system, the digestive system, the respiratory system, etc.) laid bare on each page. The body I speak of is very different from the body we have been taught to see and even to feel, very different, finally, from that complex machine whose broken parts or struck systems are diagnosed by our medical doctors and “repaired” by our medical technologies. Underneath the anatomized and mechanical body that we have learned to conceive, prior indeed to all our conceptions, dwells the body as it actually experiences things, this poised and animate power that initiates all our projects and suffers all our passions.²

Gone here is the Cartesian separation of mind and body. There is no difference between mind and body; the mind is part of the body.

In recent philosophy, an embodied mind thesis has emerged in which the nature of the human mind is largely determined by the human body. Philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive scientists argue that all aspects of knowing, including reason, are shaped by aspects of the body. The aspects of the body that shape the mind include the motor system, the perceptual system, the body’s interactions with the environment, and even the ontological assumptions about the world that are built into the body and the brain. In terms of cognitive science, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson take as axioms three major findings:

The mind is inherently embodied.
Thought is mostly unconscious.
Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical.³

When taken together and considered in detail, Lakoff and Johnson find these conclusions from the science of the mind at odds with most of Western philosophy, especially with the influence of Descartes over the last three centuries. Descartes concluded that thinking is what

2. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 45-46.

3. See especially George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenges to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 3.

makes us human and distinct from the rest of the animal creation. Man is *Homo sapiens*. What's more, thinking is disembodied because it transcends our physical bodies. But as Lakoff and Johnson write in their magisterial work, *Philosophy in the Flesh*:

Reason is not disembodied, as the [philosophic] tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. The same neural and cognitive mechanisms that allow us to perceive and move around also create our perceptual system and modes of reason.⁴

Hence, reason is not a function of a disembodied mind. It is shaped by the peculiarities and particularities of our human bodies. What we think about things is conditioned by how our bodies have developed and by what our bodies have experienced. These hidden thought processes are largely unconscious (depth psychology digs out these unconscious thoughts). And while Descartes might have rejected the use of the imagination in reason, he was not averse to using metaphor since he regarded thinking as a process of “enlightenment”—that is, shedding light on a subject.

If the mind is not disembodied but part of the body, how do we reach the mind through the body? The pioneering body worker, Deanne Juhan, author of the classic bodywork manual, *Job's Body*, expresses it this way in an online article entitled, “Reaching the Mind with Touch: Touch as Language in the Body's Landscape of Perception.” One reaches the brain with all of its stored memories by touching the skin. After all, the nervous system runs through the entire body. Moreover, writes Juhan,

‘Mind’ is vastly more extensive than ‘brain.’ Mind involves the whole of our landscape, and all of the internal and external ecological processes that are fused into those mysteries and miracles that we call life and consciousness. We are moved by all levels of our feelings, ideas and beliefs, our current assessments, needs and intentions, and by all of the countless processes that underlie them.⁵

4. *Ibid.*, 4.

“Mind” is the intelligence that resides in the body. The physical body has its own intelligence. As a former piano student I know that fingers can sometimes have a mind of their own. Sometimes they follow the path they have learned on the keyboard when the brain goes blank. Athletes also experience motor memory when they make instantaneous decisions on the sports field without thinking about what they need to do with the ball that suddenly comes into their possession. For these reasons, both physical therapists and yoga teachers have begun talking about the intelligence of different parts of the body.

Theologically, if God is going to transform our minds (conversion) he must do so through the body. This is the role and the impact of the sacraments on the body. God relates to us by impacting our bodies through earthly means that become means of grace, particularly Holy Bath (baptism) and Holy Meal (Communion). In response, we relate to God by using our bodies in the worship of God.

Theology of the Body

But more than that, our bodies are connected to the cosmos. Realizing this was the great contribution of Tantra to the yoga tradition. Most of the yoga traditions in India viewed the body as what Georg Feuerstein calls “a breeding ground for *karma* and an automatic hindrance to enlightenment.”⁶ Tantra, on the other hand, does not view the world or the body as mere illusion, but as a manifestation of Reality. Feuerstein wrote,

If the world is real, the body must be real as well. If the world is in essence divine, so must be the body. If we must honor the world as a creation or an aspect of the divine Power (*Shakti*), we must likewise honor the body. The body is a piece of the world and . . . the world is a piece of the body.⁷

5. Deane Juhan, “Reaching the Mind with Touch: Touch as Language in the Body’s Landscape of Perception,” *Job’s Body*, October 12, 2010, <http://www.jobbody.com/pages/articles/reachingthemind.html>.

6. See Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 53.

7. *Ibid.*, 53.

In a similar way, the late Pope John Paul II, as a student of philosophy, was influenced by phenomenology, and in his catecheses on the theology of the body he took as a fundamental principle, “I don’t *have* a body, I *am* a body.” That is, we must relate to God, to others, and to the world through our bodies. But more than that, Pope John Paul II viewed the body as a sacrament, a visible sign of God in the world. “The body, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it” (Address on February 20, 1980).⁸

All the fullness of God dwelled in the body of the human Jesus. St. Athanasius says in his apologetic treatise *On the Incarnation*, “He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the mind of the unseen Father.”⁹ The ways Christ manifested the mind of the Father in his body, as listed by Athanasius, include his birth and death, resurrection and ascension—the work of Christ enumerated in the Nicene Creed.

In Christian baptism we receive the Spirit of the Father and the Son. We are bodily incorporated into, made members of, the body of Christ in the world, and our bodies, individually and collectively, are hosts to the Holy Spirit. As the apostle Paul says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20, NRSV).

Body Scan

If we are our bodies, part of getting in touch with ourselves is getting in touch with our bodies. If we are going to worship God with our bodies—if we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice—we should know what we are to present. To get to know the body better, I invite you to do a body scan meditation. This is an exercise in learning how

8. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 203.

9. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. Penelope Lawson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1953), 93.

to sense, with keener awareness, the body as a whole and also the specific parts of the body. It does so by inviting you to concentrate on different parts of the body, one part at a time. Holding your focus on each part, you will use your mind to quietly sense what is going on in that part of your body. Perhaps this meditation is also a way to reintroduce yourself to parts of your body you haven't paid attention to in a while. (Perhaps someone could read this meditation slowly while you experience it.)

Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor on a low cushion with legs crossed (remove your shoes) and with your spine straight, your head on top of your spine, your hands on your knees with your palms open, and your eyes closed. Alternately, you may lie on the floor with legs and arms extended at a slight angle, feet falling limp toward the floor, palms facing up, and eyes closed. Note anatomically that open palms will subtly rotate your shoulders back, which will open your chest and also lengthen your spine. (This is savasana or "corpse pose," which is used as the final relaxation in yoga sequences.) Take a long deep breath through your nostrils, then breathe it out through your mouth like a big sigh (my yoga teacher calls this the "falling-out breath"). Do it several times. Then rest in the natural flow of your breath and allow your whole body to relax and your mind to begin to settle.

Bring your attention to the top of your head, and without looking for anything in particular, feel the sensations there. Then let your attention move down to the back of your head, to either side of your head, to your ears, your forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, mouth, and jaw. Be as slow and thorough as you like. Notice any sensations in these areas. Be aware of the brain inside your skull sending messages to the rest of the body through the nervous system.

As you continue the scan, be careful not to open your eyes; they will direct your attention to something outside the body. Instead, connect directly with sensations by feeling the body from within the body. In certain parts of the body, it is common to feel numbness or to not perceive noticeable sensations. Let your attention remain in those areas for a few moments in a relaxed and easy way. You may find that as your attention deepens, you become increasingly aware of sensations. Images or thoughts will naturally arise.

Notice them passing through and gently return your attention to the sensations. If you become distracted you can always return to the breath. Release all ideas about what you think you should experience and simply experience your physical aliveness exactly as it is.

With a relaxed, open awareness, begin a gradual and thorough scan of the rest of your body. Bring your attention to the area of your neck and throat, noticing without judgment whatever sensations you feel. Then let your attention move to your shoulders and slowly down your arms and to your hands, feeling the sensations and aliveness there. Feel each finger from the inside, as well as the palms and the backs of the hands. Notice tingling, pulsing, pressure, warmth, or cold. Slowly move on to explore the sensations in your chest. Be aware of your heart sending oxygen throughout your body by means of blood flowing through your arteries as pumped by the heart. Then allow your awareness to move into your upper back and shoulder blades, then down into the middle and lower back and around to the abdomen. Consider the stomach and digestive track breaking down energy for use in the body and sending it on to be expelled from the body.

Continue to let awareness sweep down the body. Feel the sensations that arise in your hips, buttocks, and genitals. Move slowly down through the legs, feeling them from within, then through the feet and toes. Feel the sensations of contact, pressure, and temperature in the places where your body touches the chair or the floor.

Now expand your attention to include your entire body in a comprehensive way. Be aware of the body as a field of changing sensations. Can you sense the subtle energy field that gives life to every cell, every organ in your body? Is there anything in your experience that is solid and unmoving? Is there any center or boundary to the field of sensation? Our bodies have been shaped by our life experiences, by the way we use them in our daily work, by diseases we have undergone, and by our habits (for example, slouching over computer keyboards). As you rest in awareness of your whole body, if particular sensations (such as pains or tensions) call to your attention, attend to them but don't try to manage or manipulate your experience; don't grasp or push anything away. Simply open your mind to the dance of sensations as they move around your body. Feel your life from the inside out.

After you've spent some time feeling these sensations, open your eyes and return your attention to the outside world. Now focus on your senses, which allow you to receive information from the outside world. There are phenomena all around you, even in this room. Be present to those things. What are you hearing now? Seeing? Smelling? Tasting? Touching? After you have taken some time to absorb the information about your surroundings your senses are receiving, take another "falling out breath" and return slowly to your sitting position.

Using the Senses and Postures in Worship

Now turn your attention to your most recent worship experiences.

What was there to *hear* in worship? (Was there music, both instrumental and singing? Scripture read aloud? A sermon? Prayers?)

What was there to *see*? (Consider the worship space and the people in it. What about symbols, art, or banners?)

What was there to *smell*? (Perhaps the aroma of fresh bread and wine? Odors from the building? Burning candles? Incense?)

What was there to *taste*? (Bread and wine? Refreshments after the service?)

What was there to *touch*? (The worship book? Other people, through handshakes or hugs? Money placed into the offering basket? Receiving the bread in your hand? Taking the cup?)

By the knowledge we have acquired through our sense perceptions, we take into our bodies (and minds) what the liturgy offers, including the knowledge of God. In book 10 of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine refers to his "knowledge" of God and confesses that when he loves God, "it is true that I love a light of a certain kind, a voice, a perfume, a food, an embrace..."¹⁰ Augustine's God is multisensual. Martin Luther reportedly said that God has given us five senses with which to worship him, and it would be sheer ingratitude to use less.

10. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, translated with an Introduction by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), 211.

We need a stretch after sitting with such concentration. Again, perhaps someone could read this to you slowly while you practice it.

*Stand up gradually. Plant your feet hip distance apart and parallel to each other, toes pointing forward, arms hanging at your side with the palms facing toward your thighs. Build upward with the spine as straight as possible. Draw your belly in and curl your tailbone under. Draw your shoulders back, but keep them relaxed. Lift your sternum and broaden your chest. Lift your head up so that it's resting on top of the spine, chin down, neck lengthened. Let breath flow in and out evenly. You are now in what is called the "mountain pose" or *tadasana* in yoga. It's a good position to learn if you spend a lot of time standing in public as a worship leader. It can be a relaxing stance.*

Now stretch your arms overhead and bring your hands together as in prayer while you breathe in. Exhale but leave your arms in place and don't lose your height. Inhale and stretch higher. Inhale and exhale a few more times to attain greater height. Now inhale and bend your torso to the right, extending your left arm past your ears while your right arm drops alongside your right leg. Push your hips to the left to gain a greater stretch on the left side. Now exhale and come back to the center with your arms overhead. Inhale and bend your torso to the left, extending your right arm past your ears while your left arm drops alongside your left leg. Push your hips to the right. Exhale and come back to the center with your arms still overhead. Now twist your upper body to the right without altering your feet and legs or losing your height. Then bring your body back to the center and twist to the left. Return to the center. Do this a few times, making sure that every time you are in the center you inhale and stretch up further. With your arms overhead, bend backward. Moving your arms into a swan dive, fold your torso forward toward the floor, your head hanging down. Bounce your torso gently several times until your hands reach toward the floor. Now slide your hands up your legs to your knees and bring your torso parallel to the floor, with your spine straight ahead. Lift your chest and head; this is called "monkey pose." Now come to a full stand with your hands in prayer position on your chest. (Note: you don't want to stand up immediately from an inversion because the blood has gone to your head and you'll get dizzy.)

Let us now reflect on how we put our bodies into the act of worship.

How do we respond to what we have received? Think back to your most recent worship experiences (different traditions have different practices).

Did you stand? If so, for what reasons? (To sing songs of praise? For prayer? To receive Communion?)

Did you sit? When? (To hear readings and the sermon? To receive Communion?)

Did you kneel? Why? (For prayers of confession? To receive Communion?)

Did you walk? When? (In processions? To receive Communion?)

Did you turn your body? Why? (To face the cross in the procession? To greet your neighbor?)

Did you do anything with your hands? If so, what? (Did you lift your hands during praise or prayer? Did you fold them in prayer or use them to receive the Communion elements?)

Did you bow? For what purpose? (To reverence the cross, altar, or reserved sacrament? To honor the name of Jesus or the Holy Trinity?)

Did you prostrate yourself? This position is unlikely to be practiced outside of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Similar forms of prostration are also used in Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist worship. After all, there are only so many ways to position the body. The Greek New Testament word *proskynesis* is often translated “to worship.” More specifically, it means “to adore” or literally “to prostrate oneself.” In the New Testament Jesus is worshiped in this sense by the wise men from the East who brought gifts to honor the Christ child, by the blind man who received his sight, by the Samaritan leper who was healed and returned to Jesus to give thanks, by the apostles who encountered the risen Lord (Matt. 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52), and by the twenty-four elders around the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 4:10). This type of prostration—falling on one’s face—is not just an expression of an interior disposition of worship; it is worship.

In yoga, prostration is called the “child pose” or the “devotional pose.” I invite you to try it.

Kneel on the floor in “table pose”—on your hands and knees, with your knees positioned about as wide as your hips. Breathe in. As you exhale move your buttocks back and sit between your legs. Lay your torso down between your thighs with your forehead resting on the floor. Stretch your arms in front of you with your palms down on the floor, which will give you a good stretch. Pull the shoulder blades wide across your back. To come up, first lengthen the front torso and then, with an inhalation, lift from the tailbone as it presses down and into the pelvis.

There is a slight variation of this pose called the God pose or crown pose in which you rise up on your knees (buttocks in the air) with the crown of your head on the floor. In this version you rest on your elbows with your hands folded in front of you. This is very much like Eastern Orthodox prostration.

The process of scanning the use of our body in worship should demonstrate to what extent worship—and liturgy, as we shall presently define it—is an embodied experience. Christian liturgy impacts the body from the day of our baptism until the day of our funeral. The unseen spiritual realities of the sacraments (or mysteries, as the Eastern Church calls them) express themselves through the physicality of the ritual. The manner in which the body expresses itself liturgically makes the essence of the liturgy bodily visible just as the essence of God for us became bodily visible in the Word made flesh in Jesus. What we are to see in Jesus is what the liturgy primarily celebrates: the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

The ancient church fathers commented on the bodily gestures and ritualistic motions of worship because those acts bear spiritual meaning. Postures, gestures, vestments, the layout of physical space in church buildings, and the choreographic positions taken for various liturgical actions are not arbitrary or superfluous. For the ancients, these aspects took on a symbolic significance as the physical expressions of spiritual realities. They understood liturgy as an enactment of the heavenly reality. The “physicality” of ritual practices that took place within the sacred spaces affected the body in perceptible ways; Christians could see and feel their spiritual

endeavors. One of the tasks of the deacons was to tell people what postures to assume: “Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive. Let us bow the head. Let us bend the knee [*Flectamus genua*].” Worship leaders still tell people when to stand, sit, or kneel.

God created us as bodies, and we use our bodies to worship God. As Pope John Paul II affirms in his theology of the body, we don’t *have* bodies; we *are* bodies. We have nothing more or less with which to worship God than our bodies. Christian worship is an incarnational—an “in the body”—experience. We worship the God who in Christ dwelt among us in the flesh and whose Spirit not only gives the breath of life to our mortal bodies but will also raise them up on the last day by breathing into them once again the “breath of life” (*nishmat chaim*), as in Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones (Ezek. 37: 1–14).

Body and Soul

Some of the church fathers, taking instruction from Greek philosophy, speculated about the soul—called the *psyche* (from which we get the word *psychology*)—as an inseparable aspect of the human self. The soul could also be called our personality, our defining characteristics. But in Christian thought the soul is inseparable from the body. Since we experience what the body experiences, so does the soul. The character of the soul—of *ourselves*—can be shaped by the traumas that the body experiences, including that part of the body known as the mind. It is not surprising that, especially in the West, a doctrine of purgatory arose out of concern for the need for the soul to be purified before it—before we—stand before God. Christians believe that we will be raised up with a glorified body and a purified soul to worship God forever. Some contemporary Catholic theologians have suggested that when we are raised up body and soul, the soul is purified by the brilliant light of Christ.

The Deuteronomist emphasizes worshipping the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. While we worship the Lord with the mind, and the mind is part of the body, it is not the whole part. Protestant worship emphasizes *hearing* the word of God, but we