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Samuel Torvend
Pacific University

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Touch me and see: A resurrection of the body in the church?
Dr. Samuel Torvend • Pacific Lutheran University

The bodily actions of Jesus

Eight days after his birth, his father clipped the foreskin from his penis, an action indicating the father's public acknowledgment of the newborn child as his son (Luke 2:21). Upon reaching puberty, he was taught to trim his beard and cut the hair on his head short – short – for no male was to look like a female whose hair grew long. Each year of his life, he drank wine cut with water and ate unleavened bread with roasted lamb at the spring equinox. At some point in early adulthood, he was washed in river water, joining a group in waiting for the advent of their god (3:21-22). One report notes that he was able to read the Scriptures in the midst of an assembly, claiming as his own the words of a prophet who brought good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. As a wandering leader, he rebuked unclean spirits (4:31-37; 8:26-39), healed people with fevers (4:38-39), exorcised demons (4:40-41), raised the dead to life (7:11-17) and, surprisingly, touched the leprous with his own hands (5:12-16). It was said: “All tried to *touch him* for power came out from him” (6:19). He gained a reputation for joining meals with hated agents of empire (5:27-32) and the wretchedly poor (9:12-17), with male critics who held him in skeptical regard (7:36-50) and women who were his students (10:38-42), with political assassins (6:15) as well as the non-violent. He was familiar with the need for grain (6:1-5), daily bread (11:3), salt (14:34), fish (9:12-17; 11:11), wine, and olive oil (16:1-9) – all elements of a Mediterranean peasant diet – but also counseled his followers to live from day to day on the generosity of strangers ((10:1-12). From time to time, he left the crowds and wrapped himself in stillness (4:42; 6:12; 9:10). Indeed, he stopped frequently to pray, alone and with others. While the religious leaders of his day, lovers of their holy text, were known for their wordiness, it seems that he did not fear but rather embraced the great silence. As a man from peasant stock, he wore an ordinary tunic yet was familiar with fine clothing (7:25) and the purpled garments of the wealthy (Luke 16:19). He noted that sitting in sackcloth and ash signals the turning of the heart to God (10:13). He received the marking of his feet with tears and fragrant oil from a prostitute who had turned herself toward his mercy (7:37-38) and, after his death, some of his women followers prepared spices and oils in order to anoint his dead body (23:55-56; 24:1). Toward the end of his life, he led a procession into the great city and, upon seeing it, began to weep, exclaiming that its inhabitants did not “recognize the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:42). At what would be the last supper with his followers, he gave them food and drink and, turning social and political practice upside down, suggested that leaders exercise their influence and power in service to others (22:24-27), their lives broken apart like nourishing bread, their power poured out like wine flowing from a flagon into a cup for the thirsty. While he had once received the tender kisses of a weeping woman (7:38), he also recognized that a kiss can be a sign of betrayal (22:47-48). Captured by the police, he was blindfolded, mocked, and tortured (22:63-65), stripped of his clothing, placed upon a cross with arms outstretched, and there, in an unholy place outside the great city, he died. (23:26-49). His body was wrapped in donated linen and placed in a rock-hewn tomb (23:53-54). Some women came to the funerary cave, ready to complete the burial practice, but encountered, to their utter surprise, two men in dazzling clothes, an astonishing counterpoint to the borrowed shroud that only recently covered his deathly nakedness (24:1-7). On that day, a work day, he, who once was dead, appeared on a road and interpreted the scriptures for a

disheartened couple and then, at table, gave thanks over bread, broke it, and gave it to them, leaving them shocked and amazed (24:13-35). On that day, a work day, he, who once was dead, appeared to his followers and, in the midst of their astonishment and fear, said to them: “Touch me and see – *touch me and see* – for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (24: 38-39). And this, too, he asked, as if the prodigious labor of being raised from the dead had sapped his energy: “Have you anything to eat?” (24:41).

Though each evangelist offers a distinctive portrait of Jesus and his disciples, they are of one voice in their insistence that, with us, he was flesh and blood. That is, with all humanity, he was and remains an “adam,” from the Hebrew *‘adam*, an earth creature. While a Hellenistic viewpoint would suggest that he and we are *incarnate spirits* (emphasis on the spirit), the anthropology of Jesus’ ancestors, the Hebrews, would suggest that he and we are *animated bodies* (emphasis on the body). Thus, the gospel writers draw our attention to his birth and his death, to his Galilean mother, Mary, and Pontius Pilate, prefect of the Roman province of Judea, under whose rule he was crucified.¹ The gospels note that he was fed, clothed, circumcised, washed, anointed, caressed, kissed, tortured, stripped, placed on a cross, wrapped in linen, and touched in his wounded side – things done to Jesus. At the same time, they narrate a variety of his bodily actions, gestures, and postures – listen to them: speaking, reading, singing, calling to people, bowing, sitting, reclining, healing the sick or possessed by touching, spitting, marking, or shouting, transforming water into wine, weeping, mourning, lifting his arms, lifting his hands, giving thanks over food and drink, eating and drinking, walking into a place of silence, leading a procession, carrying a cross beam, showing his wounded body and asking others to touch him. “Touch me and see,” he says, “for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (24: 38-39).

The actions of the Redeemer have passed into the life of his Body

Leo the Great, bishop of Rome in the fifth century, preached this during the Easter season: the actions [*sacramenta*] of the Redeemer during his life on earth have passed into the life of his Body through the actions of the church.² That is, the Lord’s bodily presence, to which the Scriptures testify, have been poured into the lives of every new generation through the gestures, postures, and actions of the Christian people, the Body of Christ: his visible and public presence in the world. Thus, for Leo, Christians are washed in water, smeared with fragrant oil, clothed in a white robe, handed a burning torch, led in procession to the assembly, greeted with bows, kissed repeatedly, marked with pungent incense, served honey mixed with milk, given a fragment of real bread and a generous drink of wine. They fast with Lord throughout the year on Wednesdays and Fridays, keep silence in prayer, and receive the imposition of hands on their heads as they mourn their sins. They are veiled or crowned, kissed by the presider, and receive cups filled with new wine when they present themselves for the blessing of their union. When ill or near death, they are marked with oil of the sick or invited, if you can imagine, to drink this “healing fat of the olive tree.”³ At the hour of death, the dying are to receive, if possible, the Lord’s Body and Blood as John’s narrative of the passion, death, and resurrection is read aloud. The deceased is clothed in a burial shroud of cotton or linen so that their clothing could be worn by a member of the family or a poor person, and then sprinkled with baptismal water before burial.

¹ Note their mention in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds

² Leo the Great, “Sermon 74” in *St. Leo the Great: Sermons in Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 93, Jane Freeland and Agnes Conway, trans. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 326.

³ Robert Cabié et al, *The Sacraments*, Vol. III in A.G. Martimort, ed., *The Church at Prayer* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 123-124.

Some of these actions – washing and eating, for instance – are referred to as *sacraments* among most Christians and, as sacraments, have received, in the history of Christianity, considerable attention from bishops, theologians, and catechists in terms of their dominical origin, benefits, and significance for Christians. As you well know, some of the theological debates of the sixteenth century centered on the number of sacraments; Roman Catholics held to seven and Lutherans claimed two based on their dominical origin and promise. But I wonder:

Is it possible that the debates and their subsequent solidification of seven or two sacraments have obscured from our vision and thus from our practice the far greater number of bodily gestures, postures, and actions to which the New Testament writings and the Christian tradition bear witness?

And this, too, a second question: *In the conflicted atmosphere of the sixteenth century, did the understandable need and incredible effort to identify one's group (e.g., Lutheran) over and against another (e.g., Roman) actually relegate the many actions of Jesus and his companions to the category of adiaphora, matters of indifference neither to be forbidden nor commanded, actions of seemingly little consequence, bodily actions meriting little or no homiletical and theological reflection?*

I wonder: *was St. Augustine on to something when he claimed that there are at least 300 Christian sacramenta or sacred actions, at least 300 ways in which God communicates God's presence and grace through ordinary matter, through ordinary gestures, postures, and actions?*⁴

I wonder: *does an understandable and necessary concern to establish sacrament – a means of grace – within dominical origin bear the unintended consequence of limiting the flow or radiance of grace? I wonder: Why would there be a concern to name as “indifferent” what may well be in our town time the astonishing experience of God's presence and grace?*

I ask these questions not only out of a desire to expand our lexicon of ritual actions, bodily actions, and sustained and serious reflection on their meanings – I do mean to do that, not one without the other – but also because we live in a time when ecological theologians, Christian ethicists, feminist historians, New Testament scholars, pastoral counselors, and social activists are drawing attention to the human body and to earth's body, that is, to the mystery of the Incarnation. Indeed, are not many of our contemporary social issues actually issues of the body: abortion, capital punishment, domestic abuse, famine, gender construction, healthcare reform,

⁴ “St. Augustine had enumerated 304 sacraments,” in Leonardo Boff, in *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, John Drury, trans. (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1987), 56. Boff offers no reference in the works of Augustine. More to the point: “Now, every reader will notice that Augustine calls all kinds of things *sacramenta* ... In the letter to Januarius ... he uses the word *sacramentum* for the constituent elements of the visible cultus, and its meaning is much wider than it is with ourselves ... he applies the same word [sacrament] to the annual celebrations of Christ's resurrection ... elsewhere he speaks of the following as *sacramenta*: the sign of the cross, salt, exorcisms, contemplation, the penitential garment; the bowing of the head, the transmission of the *symbolum* [the Creed], the taking off of shoes, and other rites of the catechumenate; and the of the entry on the period of being *competentes*; the octave of Easter, penance, the laying-on of hands, reconciliation, the great fasts, spiritual songs, the Lord's Prayer. Their common characteristic is that they are all of some spiritual importance and are externally visible,” in Frederick Van der Meer's *Augustine the Bishop: Church and Society at the Dawn of the Middle Ages*, Brian Battershaw and G.R. Lamb, trans. (New York: Harper, 1961), 280-281. See as well Augustine's *Sermons* 228-229 in which he speaks of a great many *sacramenta* (sacred signs or actions).

hunger and food insecurity, marriage and divorce, sexual relationships, and torture? All of these we find present, to one degree or another, in the scriptures and the life of the early Christian community. Indeed, in light of these contemporary crises and questions, biblical scholars, ethicists, historians, and theologians are constructing Christian histories, ethics, and theologies of the human body and earth's body, but, alas – but , alas – histories, ethics, and theologies rarely grounded in the liturgical and sacramental practices of the churches.

Is that so, I wonder, because the churches have given considerable attention to the celebration of the liturgy and very little attention to the body in liturgy and in life? Is that so, I wonder, because the churches and their leaders have seen the manifold actions, gestures, and postures of Jesus as mere matters of indifference, his speaking, his “preaching” alone regarded as significant?

Who or what shapes our experience and perceptions of the body?

At this moment, I am mindful of the university students I teach and the enquirers or seekers who come to the parish where I serve, many of them with some experience in the churches yet all of them – *all of them with you and me* – schooled, tutored, whether we know it or not, whether we know it or not, in what I call the “catechism of contemporary American culture.” Of course, such a claim implies that there is more than one “catechism” alive in the hearts and minds of those who constitute the worshipping assembly. It is to suggest that the culture we inhabit is not a value-free and neutral reality, though much of the time this is the experience and understanding of culture with which we are raised. Rather, our culture is full of messages that invite you and me to imitate various life-styles, visual images and musical messages that seek to shape our consciousness, and persuasive communications prone to deception and manipulation. While we might think that we participate or inhabit North American culture, it is probably far more accurate to say that American culture inhabits us given the pervasiveness of the print, digital, and electronic media we and others may find so difficult to turn off or ignore. This is to suggest that powerful and persuasive forces in our culture aggressively and constantly shape perceptions of our bodies and those of others in order to achieve a particular end. For instance, we inhabit a capitalist economic system in which one is free to acquire as much capital as possible, unfettered, it seems, by any restraint. We also inhabit a culture in which we are told daily that one's body is in constant danger of aging, of becoming unproductive. Here's where economics and marketing converge: if, in a free-market economy, you or I have the funds, and we must have the funds, to purchase the right exercise regime, diet, clothing, or injections, we are promised in the most alluring manner that we will be saved from a dated and useless future, from – note the word – the “ravages” of time; an understanding of time alien to Christian faith and life. One wonders, then, how the precious teaching on justification by grace might offer a robust critique of this ever-present “cultural catechism” whose curriculum subverts the great baptismal action of *unity* by, in fact, dividing male from female, ethnicity from ethnicity, the privileged from the powerless, the wealthy few from the many poor, the young from the old – dividing people into neat demographic quantities for the sole purpose of increasing market share and making a profit.⁵

⁵ Is no one struck by the ways in which such corporate thinking has thoroughly permeated the life, thinking, and language of the contemporary church? With declining numbers and the anxiety such a decline prompts among some, the churches have run to corporations and non-denominational, non-sacramental, and thoroughly American “church growth” strategies in order to find the “solutions” that will allegedly staunch the bleeding. One is mindful of Bonhoeffer's condemnation of the church in Germany: “The price that we are having to pay today in the shape of the collapse of the organized Church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost. We gave away the word and sacraments wholesale: we baptized, confirmed, and absolved

My university students, tutored in this cultural catechism, are well-acquainted with political leaders who divorce their spouses diagnosed with cancer and tweet photographs of their genitalia to high school girls. They are well-aware of church leaders and athletic coaches who *privately* molest children and *publicly* condemn faithful relationships between gay and lesbian Christians. In the midst of much body anxiety, I wonder if our students can experience the compassionate and healing touch of Christ, mediated through my hands, your hands. I wonder if they or their children will experience the baptismal bathing and the generous anointing of their bodies with fragrant chrism. Having rarely if ever experienced formation in their God-given social nature and the ways in which their actions affect others, they are not immune to binge drinking and date rape. Experts at finding every website on the internet, they have quick access to hundreds of porn sites yet they are quick to hear from their conservative evangelical friends that the Bible teaches a punishing sexual ethic and absolute sexual abstinence prior to marriage. Between these two extremes – the sexually objectified body and the untouchable “docetic” body – there seems to be no other alternative. I wonder: Why?

They are now surrounded by noise day and night, addicted, with many of us, to the smart phone or the ear buds sealing off any voice from the outside. And yet I dare say that once monastic silence was thrown out the window in the reform of the 16th century, the need for a constant stream of wordiness has been the hallmark of most Protestant worship. Entering the great silence with Jesus does not seem to be a productive use of one’s time in a capitalist economy. While college-age women, schooled by the fashion industry, have suffered with astonishing degrees of anorexia and bulimia, their male classmates have finally caught up with them in the pursuit of the perfectly ripped body, aided by harmful steroids and punishing exercise regimes. No wonder it is easy for them to consume the paper thin wafer we call the “Body of Christ” and the tiniest sip of grape juice from a shot glass: the thought of eating real bread and drinking real wine is anathema to the cultural tutors in bodily perfection.

Is the Christian liturgy a form of resistance to cultural malformation?

I think we would all agree that the practice of the liturgy and celebration of the sacraments are primary means of grace, God’s merciful advance in Christ toward God’s creatures. But, I wonder if the liturgical and sacramental practices, if the gestures, postures, and actions of the worshipping assembly might also serve as *an embodied form of resistance* to a cultural catechism focused on toxic individualism (that is, only my body matters) and consumerist commodification (that is, your embodied well-being is dependent on your capacity to purchase goods and services, unfettered by regard for others and the earth)? On the one hand, there is the idolatry of gaining and hoarding earth’s goods for the individual or closed community alone, an objectification of creaturely, bodily existence, and a subsequent reduction of personal relationships to “dominance and self-aggrandizement.”⁶ On the other hand, there is the Christian liturgical and sacramental vision of life as relationship with embodied and different others – different others –and life as a generous sharing of God’s gifts among all God’s creatures.

a whole nation unasked and without condition. Our humanitarian sentiment made us give that which was holy to the scornful and unbelieving. We poured forth unending streams of grace. But the call to follow Jesus in the narrow was hardly ever heard,” in *The Cost Discipleship*, R.H. Fuller, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 58. As one German Lutheran commentator of North American liturgical practice recently noted: “The American tendency to ensure that every single option – liturgical and musical – is offered in a ‘menu’ of services has more to do with the practice of McDonald’s than it does a clear sense of Christian identity and purpose.”

⁶ Michael Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith & Culture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 129.

In other words, might we see the Christian assembly as a gathering before God in which the Word of God is proclaimed in its evangelical radiance and the gestures, actions, and Sacraments of grace are celebrated in their catholic fullness and, at the same time, recognize that at the center of this gathering is the One, crucified and risen, who, with his bodily gestures, postures, and actions, questioned, critiqued, and reversed cultural messages and expectations?

Might we see the Christian assembly as that gathering in which we actively cultivate practices that honor the body: the body in need of washing, moisture, clothing, and light; the body in need of others in order to become more fully human; with hands opened, the body in need of food and drink in order to live; the body fasting from food and drink, fasting in order to share bread and cup with the hungry poor; the body at rest and repose in the great silence; the body, marked repeatedly in the sign of the cross, processing, walking, steadfastly into a world marked by overwhelming suffering; the sick or suffering body receiving the healing oil and caress of the olive tree; the body crowned with greens and flowers, crowned with another body in common faith and mutual love until death parts them; the body of the font, ambo, and altar, the bodies of the very young and the very old, of the “abled” and disabled honored with profound bow and the pungent smell and smoke of incense; the dying body touched and held tenderly, fed a morsel or given a sip of Christ’s own food and drink, surrounded by images of the Lord’s suffering and resurrection; the dead body clothed in the baptismal garment, crowned with earth’s flora, and laid to rest in God’s garden, the earth?

Is it possible that the many congregations, schools, and seminaries of the church might yet become centers of formation in practices, inspired by the Bible and the liturgy, that both honor the body and challenge those cultural practices that dishonor or malform this profoundly personal and social gift of God?

Discerning a *theologia crucis* in Christian rituals of the body?

In his work on the prophetic dimension of the liturgy and sacraments, Joseph Martos notes that “what Christians find in the Bible is ... a prophetic revelation of who we are and what we are called to be. The proclamation of the Scriptures in the midst of the community is prophetic in that it reveals what God wants us to hear, not about there and then, but about here and now.”⁷ [Good God, deliver the churches from those preachers who invite the assembly to imagine what it would be like to be with Jesus in the 1st century, when what the assembly desperately needs to hear is how he is with us in the 21st century] Yet Martos also notes that we should not overlook the fact that the liturgical and sacramental rites themselves – themselves – communicate messages to us and with us. That is, these actions communicate persuasively, louder than words, “especially when we are not passive observers but active participants in the ritual [actions] for they immediately affect our behavior, and through repetition influence our perduring attitudes and inclinations.”⁸ We hold – do we not? – that through the liturgical preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Spirit awakens or re-awakens the assembly to faith in God and love for the neighbor in need. That is, there is a theological dimension – trust or faith in God – and an ethical dimension – faith active in love for the neighbor in need, not one without the other. But I wonder:

⁷ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2009), 228.

⁸ Martos, *The Sacraments*, 228.

*Do we recognize and affirm Martos' claim, that the bodily gestures, postures, and actions of the liturgy are prophetic communications of God's presence, a presence marked not only with personal but also social and ethical value, that these actions affect behavior, attitudes, and inclinations?*⁹

If the bodily gestures, postures, and actions of the liturgy are simply matters of indifference, mere adiaphora, why bother? But if there is any truth in Leo's claim that the actions of the Redeemer during his life on earth have passed into the life of his Body through the actions of the church, do not such bodily actions call out for sustained practice, engaging catechesis, and greater theological reflection, catechesis not marked – *not marked* – by deadening “explanation” but rather by the evocative unfolding of the gestures' many meanings? And one wonders why the churches are in decline. Is it not clear that too often and too widely the Mystery of God's Holy and Life-giving Presence is transformed, by sermon, lyric and tune, into the tiresome and the conventional, the worship of the churches an unending stream of chatter?

Indeed, I want to suggest that the many bodily gestures, postures, and actions of the liturgy possess not only a theological dimension – Christ acting in the assembly through the assembly's actions – but also an ethical dimension. Let me offer one example. In his condemnation of the spiritual economy of the late medieval church, Luther saw an intimate relationship between the human condition apart from grace – the self turned inward on the self alone – and an insatiable desire for wealth manifested in individuals, corporations, and empires.¹⁰ Such overwhelming desire for more and more in the presence of incredible need could be symbolized by what Luther and his colleagues witnessed everywhere: the *grasping hand* of a robust mercantile class, greedy clergy, and the imperial pillaging of the New World set next to the *open hand* of orphans, widows, the homeless, and the hungry poor begging for food or coin. The power of grace, so Luther claimed, was the power to turn the self-absorbed and grasping hand open and outward, in evangelical charity, to one's neighbor in need. At the same time, the open hand is also recognized in the crucified hand, where one sees God's embrace of human suffering. And this, too: the open hand receives the gift of Christ's body given in a fragment of bread. Here the theological – Christ's gift – joins the ethical – care for the suffering neighbor. Is it any wonder, then, that Luther's last will and testament, inscribed on that scrape of paper found in his coat, read: “Wir sind Bettler,” we are beggars.¹¹ For Luther knew well and had reflected on the evangelical and ethical

⁹ If there is any truth in this claim, one then wonders how robust catechetical, homiletical, and theological reflection – in the midst of enquirers, catechumens, children, and the assembly – will take place given the remarkable paucity of resources available to Anglicans and Protestants. Consider Antonio Donghi, *Words and Gestures in the Liturgy* (Liturgical Press, 2009); Uzukwu Elochukwu, *Worship as Body Language: An Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Liturgical Press, 1997); *Liturgical Gestures, Words, Objects* (Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, 1995); Balthasar Fischer, *Signs, Words & Gestures: Short Homilies on the Liturgy* (Pueblo Press, 1981); Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (Pio Decimo, 1956; Michael Glazier, 1979). Book chapters discuss selected gestures, postures, and movements: Anna Kai-Yung Chan, “Participation in the Liturgy,” in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, Vol. II: *Fundamental Liturgy*, Anscar Chapungco, ed. (Liturgical Press, 1998); Peter Elliott, “Ceremonial Actions,” in *Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite: The Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours* (Ignatius Press, 1995); A.G. Martimort, “Liturgical Signs,” in A.G. Martimort, ed., *The Church at Prayer*, Vol. I: *Principles of the Liturgy* (The Liturgical Press, 1987); Gilbert Ostdiek, “Liturgical Action” and “Liturgical Objects,” in *Catechesis for Liturgy* (Pastoral Press, 1986)

¹⁰ See “Greed Is an Unbelieving Scoundrel,” in my *Luther and the Hungry Poor: Gathered Fragments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 115-123.

¹¹ *Weimar Ausgabe* 85, 5, 317-318.

significance of the open hand: God's open hand casting seed on the soil of the newly-created earth; Christ touching the leper with his open hand and thus joining him as an outcast; the open hand of the crucified Christ; the open hand of the Christian awaiting the Bread of Life; the open hand of the poor, hoping for a morsel of bread to sustain them through a cold and bitter night. And so I wonder: might there yet be a resurrection of the body, that is, a revitalization of the gestures, postures, and actions of the body in Christian worship, the Christian's imaginations, and Christian life in the world? For indeed, these very ordinary actions, rooted in our biology, ecology, and psychology are transfigured by Christ into gestures of identity and purpose, thanksgiving and supplication, lament and healing.

In his little yet remarkable book, *Sacred Signs*, a commentary on the body in worship, the German liturgical theologian, Romano Guardini, wrote that Christian leaders and theologians readily *avoid* talk of the body – perhaps because they are uncomfortable in their own bodies, perhaps because they are susceptible to the gnostic heresy that always asks for hearing in every generation. “Something within us objects [to such talk],” he wrote. Within the prosaic and analytical systems of our cherished theology and theological categories, perhaps the body – with its vulnerability and inevitable diminishment and decay – seems unworthy of much attention. And so Guardini offers this advice: “Let us avoid all empty and unreal talk and concentrate the more carefully on the actual doing [on the bodily actions themselves]. That – the doing of the actions – is a form of speech by which the plain realities of the body say to God what its soul means and intends.”¹²

Yes, I say: let us avoid unreal talk and concentrate on the actions and their meaning for life in this beautiful yet troubled world. Yes, I say: let us avoid unreal talk and enter into bodily gestures of the One who humbly chose the Virgin's womb.

¹² Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), 18