Four Theses Concerning Human Embodiment

Gregg R. Allison

Introduction

A basic definition of “embodiment” is “having, being in, or being associated with a body.” While “the body is a biological, material entity,” in terms of a discipline of study, embodiment is “an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world.” A theology of human embodiment, a topic on which I am currently writing, is important for many reasons, including: (1) an understanding of God’s creation of human beings and his design for human flourishing (thus, the theology of creation); (2) the constitution of human nature (thus, theological anthropology); (3) the somatic effects of the fall and sin (thus, hamartiology); (4) the nature of the incarnation (thus, Christology); (5) the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of, and divine action through, redeemed human beings (thus, pneumatology and soteriology); (6) the strangeness of disembodiment in the intermediate state and the completion of God’s redemptive work through the general resurrection (thus, eschatology); (7) numerous contemporary moral and social issues such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, transgenderism and gender dysphoria, and body image and body modification; and (8) an exposé of the devastating
impact of Gnosticism/neo-Gnosticism on the America society and church.

This address moves along and develops the following points: four presuppositions of my address; four theses concerning human embodiment; six implications of these theses; and a conclusion.\(^5\)

**FOUR PRESUPPOSITIONS**

1. **Human nature is complex, consisting of a material element and an immaterial element.**

   It is beyond the scope of this presentation to address matters such as dichotomy,\(^6\) trichotomy,\(^7\) the origin of the soul and of the body,\(^8\) the various types of dualism (e.g., Platonic, Cartesian), the mind-body problem (e.g., pre-established harmony, epiphenomenalism), the hard and soft problems of consciousness,\(^9\) the identity of the *imago Dei*,\(^10\) the similarities and dissimilarities between human bodies and those of other created beings,\(^11\) and the like. My presupposition is some form of dualism (my preference is holistic dualism à la John Cooper with a nod toward emergent dualism/personalism shorn of William Hasker’s evolutionary framework)\(^12\) and a strong rejection of monism in any form (e.g., Nancey Murphey’s non-reductive physicalism, Berkeleyian/Hegelian idealism/immaterialism).\(^13\)

   While embracing some form of (soft/holistic) dualism, I focus this presentation on the material aspect of human nature, or, better, human existence as an embodied condition.

2. **Christian theology and the church have been, and continue to be, infected with Gnosticism/neo-Gnosticism.**

   Gnosticism, beginning in the second century, was a complex heresy consisting of numerous movements, and it came to express itself in various ways throughout the ensuing centuries.\(^14\) In its contemporary permutation, neo-Gnosticism is also a multifaceted reality.\(^15\) To overly simplify, a definition and examples of one key tenet of Gnosticism/neo-Gnosticism are: spiritual/immaterial realities are inherently good, while physical/material realities are inherently evil. The first example comes from Christology: The Son of God could not become incarnate (embodied) by taking on material human
nature (a body); thus, Jesus only appeared to be a man (Docetism). The second example comes from soteriology: salvation consists of the escape of the soul/spirit from the body.\textsuperscript{16}

Historically, the church has confronted Gnosticism by appealing to the following biblical/theological considerations: God’s creation of the physical universe; God’s creation of embodied image-bearers; the goodness of procreation and vocation, that is, human life and flourishing in this physical reality; the incarnation of the Son of God; Jesus’s resurrection; the Spirit’s indwelling of believers as embodied Christians; the future resurrection; and the physicality of the new heaven and new earth. The same points can be scored in relation to neo-Gnosticism.

Tragically, Gnosticism/neo-Gnosticism continues to infect the church and Christian theology, leading to disregard for, distancing oneself from, or disparagement of, the body.\textsuperscript{17} Some reason that, because our body is inherently evil, and because our body is going to stop functioning and be sloughed off at death, then we should give no attention whatsoever to it; our body doesn’t matter, so any concern for it is a complete waste of time. Others view the body in instrumentalist terms, not dismissing the body as inherently evil but diminishing its importance. They may even consider the body as good, but not as good as the soul, so they spend their time pursuing “spiritual” disciplines while viewing “physical” disciplines as only serving an instrumentalist purpose: to keep the body functioning well so they can engage in the more important matter of “spiritual” growth, which is unrelated to the body.\textsuperscript{18} Still others imagine that human embodiment is a mistake, quipping as does C. S. Lewis: “the greatest joke is our body.”

3. While historically relegated to secondary status (behind, for example, Trinitarian theology and Christology), theological anthropology, with a particular emphasis on human embodiment, is a crucial systematic theological locus today.

It stands at the heart of discussions, current in the socio-political and ecclesial spheres, about human personhood, gender dysphoria, the phenomena of transgenderism/transageism/ transracialism/transpeciesism, heterosexuality and homosexuality, dehumanization and objectification, body image, the obesity epidemic, anorexia and bulimia,
compulsive exercise, orthorexia, body modification, selfie dysmorphia, and more. Affirming these four theses concerning human embodiment is not a panacea when it comes to caring for people who wrestle with these and other struggles, but they do provide the proper theological foundation on which Christians and the church should construct their mercy and caring ministries. If this is the case, then Christian theology is duty-bound to engage in more careful and expansive theological anthropology in general and human embodiment in particular.

4. These four theses explore the ontology of human embodiment and will not address gender roles and authority structures. Gender roles and authority structures will not be addressed.

The four theses are as follows:

1. the created body thesis
2. the gendered body thesis
3. the particularity thesis
4. the sociality thesis

**FOUR THERSES (PRESENTED AND BRIEFLY DEFENDED):**

1. *The created body thesis:* The first thesis is that embodiment is the proper state of human existence. Indeed, God’s design for his image bearers is that they are embodied human beings. According to this thesis, I rightly affirm, “I am my body” (please note the first presupposition, according to which I do not affirm “I am only my body”). This thesis contradicts the popular contention, “You don’t have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.” On the contrary, “I am my body.” Embodiment is the proper condition of human existence.

Biblical support for this first thesis is found in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”
So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
and male and female he created them.  

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and  
fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over  
the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”  

Narratively, verse 26 presents the divine deliberation; the three Persons  
purpose together to create humankind. Verse 27 affirms the actualization  
of the plan, as the triune God creates men and women in the divine image.  
And verse 28 recounts the divine blessing and mandate given to God’s  
image bearers. A theological reading of this text notes that embodiment is an  
esential feature of God’s holistic creation of human beings. To be recalled  
is the fact that there is another realm of created beings—angelic beings—  
that is not embodied, but immaterial. However, human beings are material/  
embodied beings, by divine design.  

This point is confirmed in the narrative of God’s creation of the first man  
(Gen 2:7). Having constructed Adam’s physical framework from the dust of  
the ground (Martin Luther calls it a “lump of clay”), God breathes into his  
nostrils the breath of life. Whether this action is the impartation of the soul/  
spirit (the immaterial aspect of human nature) or, as I prefer, the conveyance  
of the spark of life (the actualizing principle) that courses through all living  
beings (Gen 1:30; 7:22), Adam is an embodied human being made alive by  
God himself.  

The purpose of this creation of embodied human beings as divine-  
image bearers can be summed up in two interrelated aspects (Gen 1:28):  
procreation (“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”) and vocation  
(“and subdue it and exercise dominion” over the rest of the created order),  
leading to human flourishing. This divine purpose—the so-called “cultural  
mandate,” or the duty to build human society—is accomplished by, and only  
by, embodied image bearers.  

In this idyllic, pristine, original creation—which is assessed by God  
himself as being “very good” (Gen 1:31)—there is no hint of impending  
disaster. Indeed, physical death, as de-creation, is the temporary separation  
of people from their body. Accordingly, the intermediate state—the period
between one’s death and the return of Jesus Christ—is an abnormal condition of disembodiment. Thus, it should not be allowed to define human nature, especially in order to give preference to its immaterial element. Human existence in the intermediate state is one of disembodiment, but it is not the way human existence is supposed to be.

Further biblical support for the first thesis is Psalm 139:13-16, which poetically presents God’s creation of individuals as embodied human beings/image bearers:

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Not only did God once create an original pair of human beings, and not only does God continue to create human beings; God personally creates each and every individual. He is intimately engaged in each and every aspect, the minute and large details, of embodied creation, which include the following: (1) a mental component, associated with the intellect, cognition, mind, thinking, memory, and reasoning; (2) an emotional component, associated with feelings, sentiments, the heart, passions, motivations, and affections; (3) a volitional component, associated with the will, judgment, decision-making, purposing, and choosing; (4) a moral component, associated with the conscience, ethical awareness, scruples, a sense of right and wrong, feelings of guilt/innocence, shame/honor, and fear/power; (5) a physical component, associated with the body, action, agency, and effecting change.

Importantly, these components cannot be sequestered into discreet parts of human nature, some pertaining to the soul, others to the spirit, and still others to the body. Indeed, rather than thinking in terms of isolation or even of influence (e.g., a bodily state influences one’s mental state, and vice versa), we should think in terms of interconnectivity, with all these aspects inextricably linked together, dependent on one another, and together
determinative for human existence, whether for suffering and misery, or for
flourishing and happiness.

Recognition of such intimate, creative activity in constructing and
sustaining us as embodied human beings, as material image bearers, should
lead to great praise and thanksgiving: We are “fearfully and wonderfully
made,” and God’s good and perfect will for us is being fulfilled in and through
us as embodied beings.

In summary, the first thesis is the created body thesis: embodiment is the
proper state of human existence. God’s design for his image bearers is that
they are embodied human beings.26

2. The gendered/sexed body thesis: The second thesis is that a fundamental
given of human existence is maleness or femaleness. Indeed, human sex/
gender maps almost completely onto (correlates with) human embodi-
ment. (The lone exception to this point is the genetic [mis]condition of
intersex, which affects a certain percentage of human beings—statistics
range from .04% to 1.7%—and will not be part of our discussion.) God’s
design for his image bearers is that they are gendered/sexed human beings.
(For the sake of clarity in reading this address, I will use the expression
“gendered human beings” or “gendered embodiment,” with “gender”
being synonymous with “sex” and both referring to genetic identity.)

Biblical support for this second thesis is again found 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.

This narrative of human creation underscores the divine deliberation
concerning, and the divine actualization of, image bearers who are either
male or female.

This point is confirmed in the narrative of God’s creation of the first man
and the first woman (Gen 2:7, 18-25). Having created Adam as the first
embodied man and placed him in the physical Garden of Eden, God proceeds
to form Eve from Adam’s physicality. Thus, she becomes the first embodied
woman and joins Adam in the Garden and, together and indispensably, they
begin to engage in the cultural mandate involving procreation and vocation for human flourishing. They are able and obligated to carry out the mandate to build society because of, and only because of, their complementary genderedness. Adam and Eve are embodied human beings, and as such, they are fundamentally male and female.

This creation of human beings as male or female is not unique or surprising, for it follows the pattern of binary creation that is narrated in Genesis 1 and 2.27

- nothing and something
- Creator and creature
- heaven and earth
- formless and void
- light and darkness
- day and night
- evening and morning
- waters above and waters below
- two types of commands: “Let there be” and “Let the earth bring forth”
- dry land and waters
- two great lights (sun and moon)
- creatures of the sea and birds of the air
- work and rest
- two trees (of life, of knowledge)
- good and evil

Importantly for our topic, the creation of human beings as male or female follows this pattern of binary creation: God created man as male and female. This common design underscores the fundamental genderedness of human beings. There is, and there is only, maleness and femaleness. There is no such thing as an a-gendered human being. No dimension other than maleness and femaleness exists.28 Moreover, given the divine assessment of the created order upon its completion—“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31)—gendered embodiment is beautiful and gestures beyond itself, prompting belief in the goodness of God its Creator.29

Wonderfully, then, human beings are male and female embodied beings—gendered—all the way down.30 As confirmation, recent research
has found that 6,500 genes are expressed differently in men and women, signifying that gendered embodiment is crucial to the identity of human beings as men and women.\textsuperscript{31} This means that human rationality, cognitive abilities, emotional make-up, volitional faculty, motivations and purposing, are gendered-determined and expressed. Gender is the most fundamental particularity of human embodied existence.

This point means that I experience myself as an embodied man, I relate to others as an embodied man, and as an embodied man I relate to God. Similarly, my wife Nora experiences herself as an embodied woman, she relates to others as an embodied woman, and as an embodied woman she relates to God. Try as I might, I cannot experience life from my wife’s perspective, from a female point of view, and vice versa. We are perspectivally gendered embodied human beings.\textsuperscript{32} We view and experience all life through male or female eyes.\textsuperscript{33}

Clearly, this thesis addresses a looming and disconcerting contemporary problem, that of detaching maleness and femaleness from biological sex (XY and XX; or, as the current notion has it, sex is that which is assigned at birth). In place of the givenness of sex, now there is genderedness, one’s self-identification as either male or female, regardless of one’s genetic/sexed identity.\textsuperscript{34} This thesis also addresses unigenderism and all other forms of non-binary genderedness (e.g., Facebook has seventy-five gender categories).

While this thesis may sound like gender essentialism—that men and women are of distinctly different natures—it is not, or it is certainly a significantly modified notion,\textsuperscript{35} because it maintains that there are no particular properties (obviously, outside of reproductive capabilities) that belong exclusively to women or that belong exclusively to men. There are, instead, common human properties that are—indeed, given gendered embodiment, must be—expressed by women in ways that are fitting to women and that are expressed by men in ways that are fitting to men. To illustrate this modification, human properties such as gentleness, courage, initiative, nurturing, patience, and protectiveness are not gender-specific but common human properties—some would be Christian virtues, some would be the fruit of the Holy Spirit—that are and indeed must be expressed by women and men in ways that are fitting to their femaleness and maleness. To illustrate, when one considers the quality or virtue of self-sacrifice, one should not think primarily of husbands in relation to their wives (in this case,
self-sacrifice in loving their wives is a biblical injunction associated with a marital role). Nor should one think primarily in terms of wives in relation to their husbands (in this case, self-sacrifice in submitting to their husband is a biblical injunction associated with a marital role). Rather, one should think in terms of siblings in Christ, all of whom are called to self-sacrifice on behalf of one another as a shared human quality (1 John 3:16).³⁶

Accordingly, people mistakenly speak of the masculine attributes of God and the feminine attributes of God. (We will avoid getting sidetracked by the fact that God is a-gendered; indeed, he cannot be male or female because gender maps onto embodiment, and God is not embodied.) Taking it a step further, people mistakenly speak of the masculine and feminine attributes of Jesus, with examples of the latter being Jesus’s washing the disciples’ feet, healing the sick, showing compassion to the Syrophoenician woman, weeping over dead Lazarus, and gently treating children. According to my modified gender essentialism, servanthood, a healing touch, compassion, lamentation, and gentleness are not properties that pertain exclusively to women or to men; rather, they concern all human beings.³⁷

To repeat: there are no particular properties that belong exclusively to women or that belong exclusively to men. There are, instead, common human properties that are—indeed, must be—expressed in gendered ways.

Please note that I’ve said nothing—absolutely nothing—about roles and authority. There are hundreds of books and thousands of articles about the roles of men and women, but this thesis explores the ontology of sex/gender, not gender roles and authority structures. It is certainly possible to affirm a difference in roles and authority structures for men and women in the home and in the church—indeed, one may even affirm a traditional view of role differences—and embrace this thesis about sex/gender.

In summary, the second thesis is the gendered/sexed body thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is maleness or femaleness. Indeed, human sex/gender maps almost completely onto (correlates with) human embodiment. God’s design for his image bearers is that they are gendered human beings.

3. The particularity thesis: The third thesis is that a fundamental given of human existence is particularity, which is defined as the condition of being an individual. God specifically designs and creates each human
being to be a particular gendered embodied individual. Specifically, each person is a particularity in terms of her ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story. As Smith notes, “embodiment is the product of a mostly local, particular history.”

Focusing briefly on these aspects of human particularity: (1) *Ethnicity*. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular ethnicity or race. The distinction between these two terms is notoriously difficult to settle. For the sake of this thesis, this property is not a matter of self-identification (this point does not dispute self-identification; indeed, the U.S. Census Bureau defines “race” in those terms) but is a matter of one’s origin, specifically one’s shared language(s), customs, religion(s), nationality. I am, for example, a Caucasian male of Scottish/Irish ancestry.

(2) *Family*. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular family background and kinship ties. This property concerns one’s family of origin or, in the case of adoption/fostering, one’s family/families of nurture. It also includes one’s birth order, birthplace, siblings, and intact parental unit or parental divorce (with or without re-marriage and blended family). Kinship concerns, for adults, either singleness (including widowhood) or marriage (in most cases, with biological and/or adopted children), perhaps including the responsibility for the care of aging parents. For example, born in Chicago, I am the firstborn son of Roy and Winifred Allison (both of whom are deceased) with one younger brother, and I am married to Nora with whom I have three adult children and ten grandchildren.

(3) *Temporality*. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular time and age. This property has to do with both mathematical time and subjective time, along with birth day and perceived age. While mathematical time is the same for all people, subjective time (time as one perceives it) varies among them. For example, time passes by more quickly for me as a 65-year old than it does for my nearly 30-year old son, Luke. Moreover, being born in 1954, I am part of the aging baby boomer crowd that is characterized by the impact of certain key historical events (e.g., the cold war and the threat of nuclear destruction; the civil rights movement), the ever quickening advancement of technology (e.g., cell phones, Surface Pro) and medical technology (e.g., X-rays, MRIs, organ transplantation),
and the seemingly unstoppable movement toward retirement. Yet, one's perceived age may differ, even significantly, from one's chronological age (e.g., I consider myself to be a “young” 65-year old). 41

(4) Spatiality. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular space and place. Indeed, the body is “the place in which we are in the world. Existence is always 'being a body in the world.’” 42 To be embodied is to be emplaced, located according to several axes. 43 Being born in the city of Chicago, I am a Midwesterner by upbringing and thus characterized by common midwestern traits such as friendliness, hard work, and aversion to change. For the last twenty-five years I’ve taught in educational institutions, and my vocational locatedness pushes me in the areas of communication and listening skills, knowledge acquisition, and preparedness. Being a Northern evangelical at SBTS situates me in a particular culture that is quite foreign to my spatiality prior to 2003, the year I joined this faculty. 44 In one sense, then, I am a product of my environment—that is true in general, and it is also true with particular reference to how this place has shaped me. 45

(5) Context. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular context. “Context” is defined as the interrelated conditions or settings in which human beings live, act, and understand their experiences. Elements present in any human context include socio-economic, political, educational, cultural, and religious factors. The socio-economic category crosses the spectrum from the generational poor to the ruling rich. The political category encompasses the two major parties as well as a plethora of political ideologies such as communism, socialism, and libertarianism. The educational category focuses on attainment of knowledge and skills. It runs the gamut from analphabetism to the doctor of philosophy and encompasses different educational approaches (e.g., Montessori and Waldorf). The vast category of culture encompasses food, clothing, the arts, entertainment, communication, traditions, transportation, leisure, environment, and health. The category of religion includes not only the major faith traditions like Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Islam, and Buddhism, but also various spiritualities (e.g., nature worship, meditation) and non-religious persuasions (e.g., secularism, agnosticism, atheism). This multi-faceted context exerts numerous and enormous influences on how human beings communicate using language and gestures; how they reason and express emotions; how they assess actions with respect to morality,
amorality, and immortality; how they engage in personal behaviors and social events; and much more.

(6) Story. Each gendered embodied individual is characterized by a particular story. This property is concerned with “the storied nature of human conduct.”46 As narratively-constituted and narratively-communicative creatures, human beings know, experience, process, remember, relate, feel, and decide according to their specific narrative. From their earliest recollections to the final moments of their life, human beings frame and recount the stories of their infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mature adulthood, old age, and impending death. Indeed, “In telling the story of how you became who you are, and of who you’re on your way to becoming, the story itself becomes part of who you are.”47 Human narratives weave together, emphasize, diminish, and cut out elements from the particularities of their ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, and context.48

This particularly thesis does not promote intersectionality, which may be defined as “the complex and cumulative way that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and yes, intersect—especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups.”49 While intersectionality treats many of the same particularities as does this presentation—gender/sex, race, social background and class, culture, and the like—intersectionality emphasizes how these particularities divide, privilege, and disenfranchise certain human beings from other human beings.50 By contrast, this third tenet about particularity is focused on the ontology of human embodiment: as a matter of fact, all human beings are characterized by ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story. What people do with that ontology is another matter. With Scripture, they may emphasize that God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26) and that all such human beings are divine image bearers (Gen 1:26-28). Or people may plunge political discussion and social order into chaos by dividing certain categories of people from other categories and privileging one group while disenfranchising others.51

In summary, the third thesis is the particularity thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is particularity. God specifically designs and creates each human being to be a particular gendered embodied individual characterized by their ethnicity/race, family/kinship, temporality, spatiality, context, and story.52
4. The sociality thesis: The fourth thesis is that a fundamental given of human existence is sociality, the condition that tends toward the association of individuals. Indeed, God’s design for his image bearers is that they are social human beings who express their sociality in appropriate interpersonal relationships and, in the case of marriage, through sexual activity.

Two definitions serve to bring clarity to this thesis. The first is a definition of sociality: Sociality is the universal human condition of being desirous for, expressive of, and receptive toward human relationship, bonding, community, and companionship. As male-gendered embodied individuals and female-gendered embodied individuals, men and women express differently their sociality. Sociality is a personal and relational reality, not a physical activity. It is not sexiness, seductiveness, or eroticism. Rather, it is the universal human state of being oriented toward others, and it is expressed in the giving and receiving that lead to and characterize human relationship, bonding, community, and companionship.

The second definition is that of sexual activity. As one type of expression of human sociality, sexual activity refers to any physical event or movement between people that is intended to arouse erotic desires and sensations for various purposes including reproduction, pleasure, relaxation, reduction of stress, connectedness/unity, and extending comfort.

Naming this fourth tenet raises the problem of language. Up to recently, my practice has been to use the term “sexuality,” but with its many associations (particularly an emphasis on physical activity), the word causes an unacceptable amount of confusion. Thus, I have abandoned its use. Other terms I’ve considered but, for one reason or another, rejected are “relationality,” “alterity,” and “sexuate installation.” Accordingly, I will use the word “sociality” and define it as the universal human condition of being desirous for, expressive of, and receptive toward human relationship, bonding, community, and companionship.

Human sociality comes with both a design and a capacity. The first aspect has just been covered: it is by divine design that all gendered embodied human beings desire, express, and receive relationships. The second aspect is the human capacity (1) to engage in those relationships according to divine design, or (2) to pervert those relationships through both unconscious
ways (e.g., a genetic propensity, an addiction) and conscious ways, that is, willful rebellion against the divine order. Biblically and theologically, that divine order expresses itself, in the case of women, (1) in relationship with other women, as friendship apart from same sex attraction and homosexual activity; and, (2) in relationship with men, as friendship apart from lust and heterosexual activity (with one exception for such activity: marriage to a man). Human sociality from a biblical perspective expresses itself, in the case of men, (1) in relationship with other men, as friendship apart from same sex attraction and homosexual activity; and, (2) in relationship to women, as friendship apart from lust and heterosexual activity (with one exception for such activity: marriage to a woman).

As a point of application, human sociality means that men and women in the church can and should be friends—better, they are brothers and sisters in Christ—and need to act according to who they are (1 Tim 5:1-2). Positively, human sociality prompts men and women in the church to know, love, respect, cherish, encourage, and care for one another as siblings. With Scripture as their guide and the indwelling Holy Spirit as their empowerment for holy living and pure relationships, Christian brothers and sisters live and champion exemplary, godly friendship.

As concerns are undoubtedly raised by this affirmation, wisdom dictates that before we jump too quickly to the potential dangers and pitfalls present in the relationships between Christian sisters and Christian brothers who are not their spouses, we should consider first the many benefits and privileges such cross-gendered, non-marital relationship offer. Jesus’s new commandment to love, as well as the many so-called “one another” passages in Scripture, come immediately to mind.

Wisdom also dictates that the church avoids incorporating a worldly, hyper-sexualization into its treatment of cross-gendered relationships. To be suspicious that such relationships are always oriented toward sexual activity, the church then views them as inherently dangerous and to be avoided at all costs. In so believing, the church unintentionally trains its members to view one another as little more than sex objects. For Christian men to treat Christian women as temptresses, seductresses whose only intention is to engage in sex with every man, or for Christian women to view Christian men as sexual predators, slaves of their sexual impulses and thus incapable of pursuing holiness in relationships with women, is to objectify and thus
dehumanize others. It is not our right to falsely assign intent of sinful sexual activity to others, thereby stripping away their value and dignity. If one Christian dehumanizes another Christian, then we no longer have two redeemed human beings. Reprehensibly, then, we destroy the possibility of obeying the Scriptural injunction to live as brothers and sisters in Christ.

In summary, the fourth thesis is the sociality thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is sociality, the universal human condition of being desirous for, expressive of, and receptive toward human relationship, bonding, community, and companionship. God’s design for his image bearers is that they are social human beings who express their sociality in appropriate interpersonal relationships and, in the case of marriage, through sexual activity.

**Six Implications**

On the basis of, and flowing from, these four theses, six important implications may be drawn for a theology of human embodiment.

1. A theology of human embodiment has implication for sanctification: God’s design for his embodied image bearers is that they are holistically sanctified, which includes growing in holiness in body. Such progressive embodied sanctification fights against “deadly” sins of the body—lust, gluttony (often associated with drunkenness), and sloth—and embraces disciplines such as fasting and silence. This perspective should lead to a lessening of Gnostically-influenced approaches to sanctification that compartmentalize Christian maturity into spiritual and physical elements and that emphasize the former and either neglect or denigrate the latter.

2. A theology of human embodiment addresses bodily blessing and discipline. The blessings of embodiment through the physical senses are too numerous to count, but include: the taste of a mouth-watering steak at Jack Frye’s, the feel of 800-thread count Egyptian cotton sheets on a king-sized bed at the end of a bone-weary day, the smell of freshly-mowed grass or chocolate chip cookies hot out of the oven, the sound of a powerful midwestern thunderstorm, and the sight of a full, double rainbow across the vast sky at the end of the storm. As for discipline, God’s design for his embodied image bearers is that
they live physically disciplined lives in areas such as proper nutrition, regular exercise, rhythms of rest, and sleep.\textsuperscript{60}

3. A theology of human embodiment affects the worship of God: God’s design for his people gathered to worship him is that they as embodied human beings express bodily what is transpiring in their heart and mind. Embodied worshipers properly render worship to God through whole body devotion to him, expressing praise, thanksgiving, confession, repentance, joy, obedience, faith, and love. This perspective should lead to a lessening of negative attitudes toward, embarrassment/self-consciousness about, and peer-induced avoidance of bodily expressions in corporate worship services.

4. A theology of human embodiment has implications for clothing: God’s design for his embodied image bearers after the fall is that they are clothed. Clothed embodiment is the proper state of human existence, and the purpose of clothing is to cover the shame of nakedness. The only exception is nakedness between husband and wife.\textsuperscript{61} Moreover, clothing expresses something important about human beings. This perspective should lead to an attentiveness with respect to the clothes human beings choose to wear.

5. A theology of human embodiment addresses suffering and healing: God’s design for his embodied image bearers after the fall is to permit them to suffer the physical consequences of living in a fallen world.\textsuperscript{62} Moreover, he calls Christians to suffer for the sake of Christ, even to the point of martyrdom. At all times, God’s grace is sufficient to sustain his people, and sometimes he will physically heal them or rescue them from persecution.

6. A theology of human embodiment prompts consideration for death and the future of embodiment: God’s design for his embodied image bearers after the fall is to permit them to die as a physical consequence of living in a fallen world (not as a punishment for sin). Physical death is the temporary separation of people from their body, so the intermediate state is an abnormal condition of disembodiment. At the return of Christ and its corollary event of bodily resurrection, people will be re-embodied and remain so for all eternity.\textsuperscript{63} (Note that this last implication about bodily resurrection as the future of human beings confirms our first thesis that embodiment is the proper state of human existence.)
CONCLUSION
This faculty address has presented and (very briefly) defended four theses concerning human embodiment:

1. The created body thesis: embodiment is the proper state of human existence. God’s design for his image bearers is that they are embodied human beings.

2. The gendered body thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is maleness or femaleness. Sex/gender maps almost completely onto (correlates with) human embodiment. God’s design for his image bearers is that they are gendered human beings.

3. The particularity thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is particularity. God specifically designs and creates each human being to be a particular gendered embodied individual.

4. The sociality thesis: a fundamental given of human existence is sociality, the universal human condition of being desirous for, expressive of, and receptive toward human relationship, bonding, community, and companionship. God’s design for his image bearers is that they are social human beings who express their sociality in appropriate interpersonal relationships and, in the case of marriage, through sexual activity.

As you consider this faculty address, let me encourage you to reflect on our embodiment and to resist Gnostic/neo-Gnostic disparagement of such a divinely designed and created, and thus proper, condition of human existence.

---

1 This address was delivered as a Faculty Address on September 4, 2019 to the faculty and students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.
In Paul’s discussion of the nature of the resurrections body, he notes, “For not all flesh [in this passage, 10 As Johnson reminds us, “humans bear God’s image in the world somatically” (Johnson, David J. Chalmers, “Facing up to the problem of consciousness,” 8 Two historical positions on the origin of the soul and of the body are traducianism and creationism. In 5 This address will not set forth the prerequisites for constructing a theology of human embodiment, but these include: (1) skill in identifying and exegeting biblical passages that are relevant for human embodiment; (2) theological acumen; (3) attention to wisdom from historical theology; (4) awareness of heresies associated with human embodiment (e.g., Gnosticism); (5) some familiarity with neuroscience, physiology, genetics, and other related sciences; (6) alertness to lived embodied experience (not a formal phenomenology of the body, but a subjective attentiveness to how people actually live and experience their embodiment); and (7) attention to patrology and ecclesiology, taking particular note that both the individual Christian and the church are referred to as “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19; 3:16-17); thus, they both are concrete arenas of the Holy Spirit’s activity. Concerning the use of neuroscience, Smith’s warning about the scientific approach is apropos: “We tend to suppose that the sort of understanding scientific research yields is relevant for all humanity, no matter what the beliefs of the people being studied might be ... [N] euroscience can be part of the philosophical study of a topic like embodiment, but must never set itself up as offering the definitive answer to the philosophical questions that caused us to take an interest in neuroscience in the first place.” Smith, “Introduction,” Embodiment: A History, 11. 6 Dichotomy was first articulated by Tertullian in his Treatise on the Soul. 7 Trichotomy, against which Tertullian argued, had been proposed earlier by Irenaeus in his Against Heresies. For further discussion of the development of these two views, see: Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 322-27. 8 Two historical positions on the origin of the soul and of the body are traducianism and creationism. In the first case, the soul originates through generation from the souls of the parents; in the second case, the soul originates by divine creation ex nihilo. In both cases, the body originates through generation from the bodies of the parents. Like Augustine, who was unsure of which account of the origin of the soul is correct, I am not convinced by either view. Fundamentally, from my perspective, the two elements—both immaterial and material—originate in God. As Creator, he designs and creates human beings as holistic “soul and body” persons. The soul does not find its origin in God alone, nor does the body find its origin in parental material alone. 9 David J. Chalmers, “Facing up to the problem of consciousness,” Journal of Consciousness Studies 2 (1995): 200-19. 10 As Johnson reminds us, “humans bear God’s image in the world somatically” (Johnson, Revelatory Body, 55). Herman Bavinck emphasized, “Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. While all creatures display vestiges of God, only a human being is the image of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and is truly human and essentially human, because, and to the extent, he is the image of God” (Herman Bavinck, In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology [ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999], 187). Clines offers, “The body cannot be left out of the meaning of the image; man is a totality, and his ‘solid flesh’ is as much the image of God as his spiritual capacity, creativeness, or personality, since none of these ‘higher’ aspects of the human being can exist in isolation from the body. The body is not a mere dwelling-place for the soul, nor is it the prison-house of the soul. In so far as man is a body and a bodiless man is not man, the body is the image of God; for the man is the image of God. Man is the flesh-and-blood image of the invisible God” (D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” Tyndale Bulletin 19 [1968]: 53-103 (86)). 11 In Paul’s discussion of the nature of the resurrections body, he notes, “For not all flesh [in this passage, Paul seems to use “flesh” interchangeably with “body”] is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish” (1 Cor 15:39). His different kinds of bodies underscores that human embodiment, or constitution by a human body, distinguishes human beings from all other created embodied beings. For further discussion, see Paul J. Griffiths, Decreation: The Last Things of All Creatures (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), especially §§ 17-22.
Thus, my response to the question, “Am I who I am principally in virtue of the fact that I have the body I have?” is positive (Smith, “Introduction,” Embodiment: A History, 2). Similarly, I affirm the remark of the Russian philosopher Vladimir Iljine, “Without this body I do not exist, and I am myself as my body” (cited [without bibliographic detail] in Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 2).

This sentiment is often attributed (as I myself have done) to C. S. Lewis, but careful research demonstrates that he is not responsible for it. Rather, George MacDonald seems to have expressed the basic idea with similar wording in Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1867), ch. 28. In either case, Federica Matthews-Green offers a needed corrective: “The initial impression that we stand critically apart from our bodies was our first mistake. We are not merely passengers riding around in skin tight racecars; we are our bodies. They embody us” (Federica Mathewes-Green, “The Subject Was Noses: What happens when academics discover that we have bodies,” Books and Culture [January/February 1997]: 14-16).

Historically, the church has wrestled with counting the human body as part of the divine image. Importantly, to affirm that the human body and human embodiment has little or nothing to do with being created in the image Dei is as much a theological statement as is the affirmation “I am my body.”

Johnson notes, “whereas there is some truth to the claim that I am my body, I cannot completely dispose of it in a number of ways, there is at least equal truth to the claim that I am my body. I cannot completely dispose of my body without at the same time losing myself. In strict empirical terms, when my body disappears, so do I” (Johnson, Revelatory Body, 80). I would slightly modify Johnson’s view by contending that the statement “I am my body” is the ground for the statement “I have a body.” Illustrating Johnson’s point, because I have a body, I can sacrifice certain parts of it for the sake of others. For example, I can donate one of my kidneys so that someone else whose kidneys are failing may, by organ transplantation, live. Or, if I suffer from body integrity identity disorder (BIID; apotemnophilia), I can request that part of my body—my left arm, for example—be amputated so that I feel whole once more. But if I sacrifice too much of my body, which I have—for example, if I donate both kidneys for the sake of others—or if I request that certain parts of my body—my head, for example—be amputated, then I (and I am my body) no longer exists (i.e., I’m dead). Thus, “I am my body” is the ground for “I have a body.” For further discussion, see Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 1. She further illustrates this point: “‘I’ve a fever,’ ‘my stomach’s on strike,’ ‘my back’s out of action’—that’s how we first perceive our illnesses. We keep them from us, see them as an isolated defect which can be remedied in isolation, until one day we have to say, ‘I’m sick.’ Then we are saying something that we do not normally say of ourselves: that our destiny is to be bound up with our bodies. In a variety of situations we can distance ourselves from our bodies, but at some point they get hold of us and will not let go. ‘I am my body’ ... It is not only my body that is sick; I am sick. I am in my body. I have no other identity” (Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 21-22).

24 This position agrees in part and disagrees in part with the analysis of my colleague, Peter Gentry, in his article “Sexuality: On Being Human and Promoting Social Justice,” Christian Psychology 8.1 (2014): 49-57. The agreement is with Gentry’s conclusion of his exegesis of Gen 2:7 in which he states, “this basic text is not specifying the soul as an aspect or component of a human being, but denotes the body animated with the life of God as a whole” (50). This position interprets that text as an affirmation that Adam, the man formed by God of the dust of the ground, became a living being when God breathed the breath of life (or animating principle) into his embodied form. God took what he had formed out of dust—the material component or body of Adam—and energized it into a living person through the impartation of the actualizing principle, or breath of life, that which courses through all living beings, not just human beings (Gen 1:24, 30; 2:19; 6:17; 7:15, 22; Job 27:3; 34:14-15; Eccl 3:18-21; 12:7; Isa 42:5).


26 Theological support for this first thesis includes the implications of the Creator-creature distinction. God, and God alone, is described by words that emphasize his transcendence, as etymologically is “otherness,” and spiritual nature: He is infinite, immaterial, invisible, independent, and immortal. As created by the God who is as just as described, human beings are designed to be, and are indeed, embodied beings, and they are described by contrasting words that emphasize their creatureliness, contingency, and physicality: They are finite, material, visible, dependent, and mortal. This is further evidence that embodiment is the proper state of human (creaturely) existence. For further discussion, but with a different application, see Molmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 88. Further theological support comes from the incarnation of the Son of God, which instructs us in a theology of humanity. Marc Cortez, ReSourcing Theological Anthropology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

27 While not commonly discussed, this created binarity is the subject of a fascinating children’s book: Danielle Hitchen, Let There Be Light: An Opposites Primer (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018). A scholarly work that develops the topic is Megan DeFranza, Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). As noted below, she takes this created binarity in a different direction than I do.

28 Contra DeFranza, who argues that the Gen 1 account is not binary in nature but presents a spectrum, with the two terms representing the two poles or ends of the spectrum, which features many intermediate created realities not mentioned in the text (e.g., dusk and dawn in between night and day). Thus, human gender/sex includes not only male and female, but all varieties in between these two poles. DeFranza, Sex Difference in Christian Theology. Important to consider is the language of “separation.” (1) “And God separated the light from the darkness” (Gen 1:4). (2) “And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’” (1:6). (3) “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night… to separate the light from the darkness’” (1:14, 18). The text also sounds a strong note of distinction of “kinds”: (1) “And God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind” (1:11-12). (2) “So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind” (1:21). Importantly, the latter creatures were endowed with the ability and given the responsibility to “be fruitful and multiply” (1:22), a task that requires the binarity of male and female tuna and male and female osprey. (3) “And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds. And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind’” (1:24-25). Accordingly, the language of the creation narrative emphasizes disconnection and distinction, not the intermediate notion that figures so strongly in DeFranza’s position.

29 This thought expands on William’s critique of Gnosticism: “The Gnostic does not consider that the beautiful nature of a work reflects the good intention of its maker. The beauty of ensouled and enformed bodies in the
universe is the primary justification that a person might have to believe in a good creator. For this reason, in stark contrast with the Gnostics, bodies . . . reveal the good intent of the maker of the universe.” Williams, “Beautiful Bodies and Shameful Embodiment in Plotinus’s Enneads,” 81. Beside being beautiful, gendered embodiment, specifically gender difference, is pleasant. As Federica Mathewes-Green offers, “For large segments of the world, gender differences are pleasant, appealing, and enjoyable, and practical application of theory—reproduction itself—is hardly a chore. (The subtitle of a Dave Barry book put it winningly: ‘How to make a tiny person in only nine months, with tools you probably have around the home.’) Yes, most cultures note and highlight gender differences, because most people find them delightful, as well as useful in producing the next generation.” Mathewes-Green, “The Subject Was Noses.” Her reference is to Dave Barry, Babies and Other Hazards of Sex: How to Make a Tiny Person in Only Nine Months with Tools You Probably Have around the Home (New York: Rodale Books, 2000).

30 As Brunner expressed this notion, “We cannot say that humanity is divided into the ‘sanguine’ and the ‘choleric’ temperament, into extraverts and introverts, into white or coloured races, into geniuses and non-geniuses, but humanity certainly is divided into men and women, and this distinction goes down to the very roots of our personal existence, and penetrates into the deepest ‘metaphysical’ grounds of our personality and our destiny.” Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology (trans. Olive Wyon; London: Lutterworth, 1939), 345.

31 6,500 genes of approximately 20,000 genes. The differences appear mostly in sexual organs, particularly the mammary glands, but also include the adipose (fat), skeletal muscle, skin, and heart tissues. Medically, these differences express themselves male- and female-prevalent diseases (e.g., the prevalence of Parkinson's disease in men) and male- and female-prevalent reactions to certain drugs. Moran Gershoni and Shmuel Pietrokovski, “The landscape of sex-differential transcriptome and its consequent selection in human adults,” BMC Biology (2017), 15:7.

32 Smith raises the issue of “the extent to which subjectivity is determined by embodiment—that is, the extent to which one's own subjective experience of the world is forged or inflected by the particular sort of body one has.” This second thesis proposes that human sex/gender maps completely onto human embodiment; thus, a woman's subjectivity—her subjective experience of the world—is completely forged or inflected by the female body she has. The same is true for a man's subjectivity. Smith, “Introduction,” Embodiment: A History, 5.


34 An example of the elevation of “gender” above “sex” is Jessica Savano, who changed from being a man to being a woman. Her failed Kickstarter campaign sought financial backing for a documentary, “I Am Not My Body.” Clearly, Savano's motto contradicts our first thesis and is rooted in the detachment of maleness and femaleness from biological sex.

35 My thanks to Gracilynn Hanson for helping me to clarify this point. While some studies show a correlation between gender essentialism and gender inequality/discrimination, the view affirmed here repudiates any and all bias and mistreatment of men and women that is supported by gender essentialism. Lea Skewes, “Beyond Mars and Venus: The role of gender essentialism in support for gender inequality and backlash,” PLoS One. 2018; 13(7). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6057632/

36 My appreciation to Gracilynn Hanson for underscoring the presence of mutual self-sacrifice in marital roles.

37 For further discussion, see Cortez, ReSourcing Theological Anthropology, 203.

38 This thesis is my initial foray into answering the question, “what is the relationship of embodiment to being and to individuality?” Indeed, my response to the questions, “Is embodiment a necessary condition of being? Of being an individual?” is positive. Smith, “Introduction,” Embodiment: A History, 2. Indeed, he urges “concrete reflection on the way differences within the human species with respect to race, gender, and physical and cognitive abilities have an impact upon the way different people navigate through and make sense of the world.” This particularity thesis represents such concrete reflection. Smith, “Introduction,” Embodiment: A History, 5.


40 I affirm that ethnicity/race is a second order characteristic, with embodied genderedness being the primary order characteristic. Sex/gender is more fundamental than race/ethnicity.


The relevancy of the following affirmation for me has become clearer through the last sixteen years: “We move through places every day that would never have been if not for those who came before us. Our workplaces, where we spend so much time—we often think they began with our arrival. That’s not true.” As spoken by Ruby to Eddie, in Mitch Albom’s *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 2003), 123.

The debate between nature and nurture continues almost unabated. Are human beings basically determined by their genetic makeup, the culture and environment in which they were raised and in which they now live, or a combination of the two factors? “The field of epigenetics is quickly growing and with it the understanding that both the environment and individual lifestyle can also directly interact with the genome to influence epigenetic change. These changes may be reflected at various stages throughout a person’s life and even in later generations.” “Epigenetics: Fundamentals,” whatisepigenetics.com; https://www.whatisepigenetics.com/fundamentals/


Words and terms such as “spin,” “embellishment,” “contextualization,” “redemptive arc,” “false humility,” “selective memory,” “autobiographical reasoning,” and “idealized self” are associated with the creation and telling of narratives, both to oneself and to others. One pathology—narcissism—is characterized by the tendency to invent false narratives that deflect from holding narcissists accountable, contradict the truth about their sorry reality, protect them from threats to expose their shame and guilt, and more.


Elsewhere, the definition is: “Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.” Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality. Key Concepts* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016). 2. Other important contributions include: Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality and Critical Social Theology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Ange-Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

As R. Albert Mohler offers, “This ideology reduces human beings to a certain set of distinguishable identities that are more prized and valued than other identities—it establishes basic human identity in differences rather than a *commonality* shared amongst all humankind.” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Power of the Gospel and the Meltdown of Identity Politics,” albertmohler.com (February 12, 2019); https://albertmohler.com/2019/02/12/power-gospel-meltdown-identity-politics/?fbclid=IwAR0WCy-rAYKoNNjP7YXhpAgDjl2n-wSoxtOYekIKYpdCQqySTl08O/V7Mic


As Marc Cortez rightly underscores, “each of these expressions of particularity is also the kind of constraint that we associate with being finite creatures, which means that limit/constraint/finitude is a good thing and not the obstacle to human flourishing that we often describe it as being.” Personal correspondence, August 16, 2019.

I still respect those who have used, and continue to use, sexuality to name this universal human condition. For example, Stanley Grenz, commenting on Gen 2:18-25, offers: “The narrative indicates that individual existence as an embodied creature entails a fundamental incompleteness or, stated positively, an innate yearning for completeness. This sensed incompleteness is symbolized by biological sex—that is, by existence as a particular person who is male or female. The incompleteness is related to existence as a sexual creature and therefore to human sexuality. Sexuality, in turn, is linked not only to the incompleteness each person senses as an embodied, sexual creature but also to the potential for wholeness in relationship to others that parallels this fundamental incompleteness … Hence, sexuality is the dynamic that forms the basis of the uniquely human drive toward bonding.” Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).
Theology of the Image Dei (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 277-78. What is for Grenz the idea of human sexuality—"the impulse toward bonding"—is, for me, the idea of human sociality. Ibid., 280.

(1) "Relationality" may be close, but as this word is also used in connection with the covenantal bond between God and human beings, it broadness works against it. "Sociality" is restricted to the human-to-human domain. (2) "Alterity" is a word that has to do with others or otherness, yet not as persons in themselves but as persons in relationship to me, persons as I perceive them. While this term captures some of what I’m trying to express in this fourth thesis, it is a rather rare word and thus not all that helpful. (3) "Sexuate installation" is a phrase invented by the Spanish philosopher Julián Marias to express the condition of men and women that prompts them toward friendship, companionship, and the like by means of the giving of themselves through their differences. While this phrase expresses some of what I’m trying to communicate in this fourth thesis, it is an expression that is unknown outside the technical field of philosophical anthropology, so not at all helpful. Julián Marias, Metaphysical Anthropology: The Empirical Structure of Human Life (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1971).

My appreciation to Gracilynn Hanson for providing the concept of, and language for, design and capacity for this fourth thesis.

For further discussion, see Aimee Byrd, Why Can’t We Be Friends? Avoidance is Not Purity (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018).

My appreciation to Gracilynn Hanson for providing the language of objectification, dehumanization, and assignment of sexual intent for this discussion.

This discussion is not a call to be naïve or careless in such cross-gendered relationships, but it does address the need to consider how we live those relationships. According to Scripture, purity is of the highest value and therefore must be promoted. But purity is not a matter of avoidance or abstention; it is not isolation or escape from others. Rather, it is a wholeness or integrity expressed in relationships that develop for the good of those involved and for the advancement of the kingdom of God. When we regard purity and reputation individually—being holy is only about me; it is my reputation that is always at stake—we may (inadvertently) communicate to others that they are dangerous/carnal/sinful and that their reputation is suspect. Thus, we need to be attentive to how our posture toward others, and the rules we impose in consequence of that attitude, reflects on them.


Allison, “Spiritual and Embodied Disciplines.”


In one sense, then, we are implicated in our bodies. Though we do not wish to be sick, stricken by cancer, decapitated by a failing body, and the like, we must acknowledge that “my body can grasp me and take me where I do not want to go.” Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 22. Practically speaking, “It’s difficult when you want to do something and your body, or part of it, doesn’t.” Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Mary Ellen Donovan, Women and Self-Esteem (Penguin Books, 1985). Cited (without bibliographic details) in Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 79.

Thus, in an eschatological sense, “our destiny is to be bound up with our bodies.” Moltmann-Wendel, I Am My Body, 21.