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# BAPTISM & THE BODY

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# 1

## Sealed for Resurrection: Baptism and the Objectivity of the Body

Christians, even those who say much about ‘incarnational’ faith, can say surprisingly little about the way that God claims our *bodies*. Perhaps this is most striking in treatments of baptism, where the intensely bodily character of the rite would especially seem to invite comment. Even if the term ‘baptism’ were to be regarded as synecdochal for a rite that contains various other ritual elements, it is noteworthy that the core ritual from which the rite derives its name involves such direct action upon the body.

The action of the ritual of baptism isn’t the act of the *candidate*, but of a minister of Jesus Christ, performed upon the candidate’s body. In contrast to the Lord’s Supper, where the communicant ‘takes’ and ‘eats’ in an actively bodily manner, the body of the baptismal candidate is passive in the act of baptism. While the body’s personal and purposeful activity and our bodily absorption of that which is external to us into our interiority are foregrounded in the Supper, it is the

*objectivity* and *exteriority* of the body and self that are foregrounded in the rite that necessarily precedes it—baptism.

My body defies the distinction between subject and object: it is both the site of my interiority and subjectivity, yet also an object that exists in continuity with the world and as a part of nature that others can act upon. My body is the site of my consciousness, my sense of self, and my action, but before these come into being, my body receives meaning and identity from other sources. My ‘self’ is never simply my *subjectivity*: it is also my bodily *objectivity* and in this objectivity my body is the bearer of ‘given’ meanings that precede me, my subjectivity, my choices, and my actions.

I am biologically related to other persons in a manner that entirely preceded and bypassed any decisions on my part. I am the bearer of resemblances and distinctive features that relate me to others and distinguish me from them. My body is the recipient of a particular genetic inheritance. I am called by a name I did not choose. My body is culturally located and assigned a place within social and cultural matrices of meaning and identity. My body is claimed by nature’s laws, which are powerfully operative within me, binding me to the physical and cosmic order beyond me. My male body, for instance, distinguishes me in a fundamental respect from—yet orders me towards relationship with—women, identifying me as a man, shaping and situating my sense of personhood. As part of the natural order, my body contains [a life that ‘goes on without me’](#). In all of these respects, the objectivity of my body means that I am ‘spoken’—by nature, culture, tradition, etc.—before I ever

‘speak’ as a subject: indeed, I could not speak were I not first spoken.

It is common in certain quarters to speak of baptism as our ‘act of obedience’ or the ‘expression of our faith’ and, in some respects, these claims aren’t entirely mistaken. Yet what they disguise is that, to the extent that baptism could be referred to as our ‘act of obedience’, it is the ‘action’ of passively submitting to the action of another; to the extent that it can be referred to as the ‘expression of our faith’, the faith ‘expressed’ is not primarily our subjective faith, but the Church’s one catholic and apostolic faith—faith in its communal and objective aspect. Baptism addresses itself directly to the objectivity of the body and seals us with a new identity. It speaks to the very foundations of our selves, to that which preceded the first sparks of our subjectivity (‘expression of faith’) and activity (‘act of obedience’). In salvation, God plucks us up by the roots.

In Romans 6, Paul relates baptism to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, events through which Jesus was brought into a new life ‘by the glory of the Father’ (verse 4). We should notice that in these events it is Christ’s bodily objectivity—not his subjectivity or activity—which is most prominent and significant. Arguably the primary New Testament paradigms of baptism—death/resurrection and rebirth—both present the objectivity of the body at their heart. In baptism we are united together with Christ ‘in the likeness of his death’ (verse 5). In death activity ceases and the body is dispossessed of its subjectivity, surrendering the body to pure objectivity. Baptism corresponds to such surrender, a dispossession through

which we are given a ‘new’ body, which provides the basis for a new mode of subjectivity and activity.

The body’s objectivity, materiality, exteriority, and priority, and its embeddedness in the natural order, in tradition, society, and culture are simultaneously preconditions for, yet also resistance to, the freedom of my subjectivity and action. The body constantly alerts us to the *givenness* of the self, to the fact that I am neither autonomous nor self-defined, but that I receive my identity in large measure from without. My freedom to ‘speak’ my own self necessarily presupposes that self has always already been ‘spoken’. I must always express myself from the unchosen site of identity and meaning represented by my body.

Once again, this reveals problems with some popular language about baptism. When we speak of baptism as expressive of the candidate’s ‘decision’, we either implicitly resist the givenness of our selves, or we fail to address God’s salvation to the most basic dimension of our humanity.<sup>1</sup> Insistence upon the reality of original sin is, in part, insistence that alienation from God is an aspect of our givenness in a fallen world, not merely a result of our subjectively chosen action. The waters of baptism run deeper than action, deeper than choice, and even deeper than consciousness and subjectivity. They declare a new

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<sup>1</sup> Behind much popular language concerning baptism lurks an incipiently Cartesian view of the self. For baptism truly to relate to the self, it is presumed that it must be some ‘external’ expression of some ‘internal’ meaning belonging to the self-present subject. The body is regarded as if it were the corpse-like instrument animated by an immaterial soul for the purposes of its self-expression. This is a tenacious misunderstanding of the nature of the human being, which affects much Christian thought.

givenness, that my body is now defined by its relation to Jesus Christ and his body.

From the moment we are conceived until the moment we die, our bodies are situated in a vast web of social meaning and relations that define and identify us in various ways. When we die our bodies are disorged from this symbolic order—or ‘law’—of society, falling back into the realm of dust (cf. Romans 7:2). Resurrection, in reclaiming bodies from the dust, results in persons who are freed from the bondage that the symbolic order of a sinful world entails. Baptism is a reality-filled promise, sealing us for such deliverance.

Resurrection isn't rescue from 'givenness' as such, but from a form of givenness in which we are alienated from God, from each other, from ourselves, and from the creation. Resurrection is not the basis for pure autonomy, but a release into a new liberating superabundant givenness. In baptism, God declares that, whatever human families or backgrounds we may come from, we are now claimed for his family, sealed for adoption. Whatever human loyalties and identities our bodies embed us within, these are at most penultimate to the ownership that God now claims of us. However deeply we may feel our bodies weighed down with the bondage of a creation subjected to futility, that creation—and our bodies with it—will one day be released into our liberty as the resurrected children of God. In baptism, God declares that, whatever histories our bodies once belonged to or possessed, they now belong to the great scriptural History that baptism evokes and encapsulates. This story arrived at its *telos* in the threefold baptism of Christ: his baptism in the Jordan,

the baptism of his death and resurrection, and his baptism of his Church at Pentecost.

The meaning of baptism is principally prospective, rather than retrospective. Baptism is a pledge and seal that anticipates future resurrection, adoption, and the redemption of our bodies. In baptism God publicly and visibly marks out our bodies for this coming deliverance. As we have been baptized in the likeness of Christ's death, we believe that we will also share in the likeness of his resurrection. In baptism God declares a truth and a promise about my body. He declares that the objectivity of my self—the bodily 'me' that precedes and lies beneath all of my consciousness, self-knowing, acting, and deciding—is in his hands. In my very frailty and mortality, I can entrust myself to him, assured in his promise to raise me on that Last Day.

## 2

### Presenting Limbs and Organs: Baptism and Sacrificial Ethics

Although we tend to define ourselves by our *subjectivity*—our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, decisions, actions—we are frequently forgetful of the *objectivity* of the self as body, the reality of the self that underlies and precedes all of our subjectivity. The body is the site of our ‘givenness’, where we are embedded in nature, tradition, society, and culture in a manner that precedes any decision or action on our part. Baptism isn’t best understood as an ‘act of obedience’, an ‘expression of our faith’, or a public manifestation of our ‘decision’—it is an action performed upon passive bodies. Within my first chapter, I argued that, by instituting a sacrament that acts directly upon passive bodies in such a manner, God claims us at our root, marks us out with a new identity, and seals us with his promise of future resurrection.

The biblical teaching that God claims us at our bodily root—a claim sealed in baptism—is prominent in the Apostle Paul’s understanding of Christian ethics. In Romans 12:1, Paul urges the Roman Christians to

‘present their bodies a living sacrifice.’ This sacrificial presentation of the body, powerfully symbolically enacted in baptism, is confirmed in lives of Christian obedience.

The sacrificial paradigm that Paul employs in Romans 12 is not so explicit, yet no less present, in Romans 6. In Romans 6:12-13, Paul declares: ‘Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.’ The grounds for this exhortation are found in our union with Christ in his death and resurrection symbolically sealed in baptism. The sacrificial overtones in Paul’s statement are to be seen not only in his use of the term ‘present’, but also in the notion of presenting ‘members’: sacrifices were offered to God in a dismembered form. This is also priestly in character: priestly initiation involved the symbolic devotion of limbs and organs to God’s service (cf. Exodus 29:20).

By speaking of the presentation of our *members*—our limbs and organs—to God, Paul accords a greater prominence to the body. What we present to God is not just our actions, nor our agency, nor yet even ourselves as agents, but the various and disparate bodily agencies and potentialities of our limbs and organs in their givenness and objectivity.

This makes a difference for the way in which we conceive of Christian obedience. It is the *membered* character of our body that alerts us to its givenness and otherness. Being an agent is a dimension of being a unified subject, my agency is a unifying bodily principle in

which my nature as an agent is expressed, and my actions are the products of that subjective agency. Paul reaches behind all of these things to address the objective givenness of the bodily limbs and organs that serve as the precondition for my being an agent, exercising agency, and being the author of actions. By stressing the diverseness and multiplicity of the bodily limbs and organs, Paul reminds us of the material body that underlies our unifying agency, reminding us that our subjectivity must always reckon with the objectivity of our bodies, an objectivity that we receive as a gift and must now render as an offering. My very hands, eyes, and feet must be presented to God; henceforth, I must live as one who acts using holy instruments. The assumption of my bodily autonomy and self-possession is challenged at its root when my limbs and organs are dedicated to God's service.

All of this presents a 'sacrificial' model of Christian obedience. In Christian obedience, we confirm in practice the offering of our bodies which occurred in baptismal ritual. Paul's grounding of Christian obedience in the limbs and organs of the body also creates an exceedingly tight connection between person and action: by acting righteously, I am presenting my limbs and organs to God, a membering of the sacrifice of my whole self.

John Barclay draws attention to a further importance of the body within Paul's account of ethics in Romans, highlighting the way that Paul locates the operation of Sin and its defeat within the body:

It is precisely in his/her corporeality that the believer is *simul mortuus et vivens* (cf. 2 Cor 4:10-11). It is not

for nothing that Paul here uses military language (“weapons,” 6:13, 19; cf. 13:14), since the body is the critical site of resistance.... The very location where sin once had most visible sway, and where its grip still draws believers’ bodily selves towards death, is now the location where the “newness of life” breaks through into action, displaying in counterintuitive patterns of behavior the miraculous Christ-life that draws their embodied selves towards the “vivification” (8:11) or “redemption” (8:23) of the body.<sup>2</sup>

Using the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Barclay argues for the importance of the reality of *habitus*, which underlies human action. Our *habitus* is our basic embodied orientation towards life, our dispositions, perceptions, sensibilities, ordering structures, tastes, styles, bodily skills, and habits. Our *habitus* is what we have ‘learned by body,’ those things that have become ‘second nature’ to us.<sup>3</sup> Paul, Barclay suggests, had a sense of this when he spoke of the ‘body of sin’ (Romans 6:6): ‘He seems to have a sense that the body has been commandeered by sin, such that its dispositions, emotions, speech-patterns, and habitual gestures are bound to systems of honor, self-aggrandizement, and license that are fundamentally at odds with the will of God.’<sup>4</sup>

The Christian life of obedience that Paul expresses is a life that begins with and in the body. The bodily *habitus* of sin has to be unworked and a new righteous bodily

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<sup>2</sup> John M.G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 505-506.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 507

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 508

*habitus* instilled in its place. And baptism is the place where this training of our bodies most clearly begins. Barclay writes:

One could hardly imagine a more effective demonstration of this “rescue” than the physical rite of baptism, which Paul interprets as a transition from death to life *performed on and with the body*. Henceforth, believers give themselves over to this new life (“as alive from the dead,” 6:13), inasmuch as they “present their organs as weapons of righteousness to God” (6:13; cf. 12:1)—in other words, they are committed to instantiate a new embodied *habitus*.<sup>5</sup>

This pedagogy of the body is almost invariably a social matter. Our bodies are trained as they are *incorporated* into a larger social body.<sup>6</sup> No one is *born* as a ‘native’ of such a community, nor can we simply *choose* to be natives; we must all be *formed* into natives through the inculcation of a particular *habitus*.<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu describes the process of becoming a native of a new community as ‘a slow process of co-option and initiation which is equivalent to a second birth.’<sup>8</sup>

Baptism is a first step in the process of forming the *habitus* of the Christian faith within us. At the point of baptism, our bodies are *incorporated*—written into—the larger social body. This formation of the individual body

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 94.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 93

<sup>8</sup> Cited in *ibid.*

through the social body is alluded to in Romans 12:1, which speaks of presenting ‘bodies’ (plural) as a living ‘sacrifice’ (singular): our individual bodies are rendered sacrificial as they are incorporated into the many membered body of Christ, which Paul precedes to discuss in the verses that follow (12:3-5).<sup>9</sup> It is a matter of great significance that baptism brings us into the social body of the visible Church. The movement of the body into the life of the Church, a movement whose first major step occurs in baptism, is an essential part of Christian pedagogy and the process of conformity to the likeness of Christ. Without baptism’s process of incorporating us into the body of Christ and the bodily training that follows it, the pedagogical process of conforming us to Christ would be in large measure absent and the most fundamental part of ourselves would not have been offered to him.

In baptism, our limbs and organs are set apart for God’s service. This divine claim upon our bodies is a founding principle of Christian ethics and the chief reason why Christian obedience is properly understood as ‘sacrificial’. Addressing our attention to the diversity and multiplicity of our bodily members in their objective givenness, Paul implicitly reminds us that we receive ourselves as a gracious gift and calls us to return the gift to its source in offering our limbs and organs up in service to God. Baptism also manifests and initiates a reorientation of the body and its members. It incorporates us into a new social body (baptism is also a practice that forms the

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<sup>9</sup> The sacrificial character of baptism and the Christian obedience in which baptism is confirmed is not primarily located in my willing offering of my own body through my ‘decision’ for Christ, but in the incorporation of my body into Christ’s offered body.

social body itself), in order that we might, through its cooption and training of our bodies—in its liturgy, rituals, practices, forms, etc.—begin to think, desire, perceive, be disposed, and relate differently, learning to live as ‘natives’ of the body of Christ. Baptism not only expresses the sacrificial principle that grounds Christian imperatives, but also begins to instil the spiritual *habitus* by which we will fulfil them.

# 3

## Embracing Embodiment: Baptism and the Nuptial Meaning of the Body

In my previous two chapters, I argued for the significance of the fact that baptism addresses our bodies in their objectivity. In the body, the self has an existence that runs deeper than our consciousness, decision, self-expression, and action. In washing our passive bodies, baptism seals us with an anticipatory seal of future resurrection. The presentation of the body in baptism, so that it might be rendered sacrificial in union with the body of Christ, manifests a fundamental principle of Christian ethics that grounds its imperatives. In baptism our limbs and organs are presented as part of the Church's living sacrifice to God in Christ and this sacrifice is confirmed in the life of Christian obedience, as we use our limbs and organs as instruments dedicated to God. In baptism our bodies are also *incorporated* into the social body of the Church, and the pedagogical process of instilling its *habitus* of righteousness within us is begun. As we 'learn by body' the way of Christ, we will be increasingly conformed to him.

It is not easy to articulate the connection between the self and the body. Although the body in its objectivity and living potentialities represents the exteriority of the person and the precondition for all subjectivity and personal agency, we frequently speak of our personhood as if distinct from and situated over against our bodies. Roger Scruton remarks: ‘Although people are essentially embodied for us, and although we always respond to them *as* embodied, it is only occasionally that their embodiment is *itself* the object of our interest, just as it is only occasionally that I am interested in the buildings of my university, rather than in its institutional procedure.’<sup>10</sup>

As we primarily relate to other human beings as *agents*, our embodiment can retreat to the shadowy background of our awareness, save for those occasions when our bodies seem to frustrate or defy our agency, occasions which may encourage a self-body opposition. In fact, in a great many of our daily interactions with other persons in the modern world—perhaps especially online—our embodiment is invisible to each other. It is not surprising, given this, that we should instinctively come to think of the body as a sort of intimate instrument of the self, rather than identifying the body *as* self. Even in our society’s significant concern for the health and appearance of the body, the personal character of the body is still neglected; the body may be considered the realm of the self’s expression and the means of the self’s sensual experience and enjoyment, but it is still thereby held at some remove from the actual self.

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Continuum, 2006), 73-74.

The selfhood of the body only rarely comes to the foreground of our awareness. Indeed, sexual relations are one of the few occasions when it really might. Even here, however, is rendered unclear in much contemporary understanding and sexual practice, which can proceed as if the self were not body. Rather, sex can often be conceived of as if it were a mutual enjoyment of bodies, apart from any deep ‘intercourse’ of persons. Bodies are perceived in detachment or at a remove from selves: our own bodies to be gratified and other bodies to be desired in ‘objectifying’ and personally effacing ways.

Yet, for all of the distortions and dysfunctions in our sexual culture, we can never fully elude the disclosure of the bodily character of the self in sexual relations. Whether it is the intimations of unrealized and neglected promise in the casual sexual encounter or the intense sense of violation in sexual abuse, we can discover that our selves are peculiarly exposed and vulnerable in sexual relations, in a manner from which no prophylactics can protect us.

Scruton writes again: ‘Although I am identical with my body, my experience of embodiment must be sharply distinguished from my experience of the body. In arousal the unity between body and person is immediately experienced, and forms the living focus of an interpersonal response. But the body is not the object of this response—as it is the object of a pathologist’s examination or an anatomist’s exposure. Arousal reaches through the body to the spirit which animates its every part.’<sup>11</sup> In the caress, for instance, the self is addressed

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 26

through and in the body.<sup>12</sup> In such a manner, sexual relations can awaken one to a new sense of oneself, of what it means, not just to have a body, but to *be embodied*.<sup>13</sup>

In my discussion of the self and the body in the previous chapters, I spoke of the objectivity and exteriority of the body and the self within it that is distinct from our subjectivity and interiority. While throughout I suggested that the bond between these two aspects of the self was a profound one, some readers might have wondered whether I was overstating the case. While the self might *have* a body, the claim that the self *is* a body might appear to some to go too far. Our bodies can often feel akin to a crustaceous covering around our subjectivity, attached to us, but a part of us with a decidedly liminal character, only tenuously related to our personal life. In its revelation of embodiment, however, sexual intercourse suggests that the body is much more than an external part of the self. Although seldom foregrounded in our consciousness—we must be awakened to it, our consciousness beckoned into our bodies—our bodies and our personhood, our exteriority and interiority, have a fundamental relation more akin to that between the outside and inside of a Möbius strip.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its familiarity, 1 Corinthians 6:19a is a scriptural text that retains much of its capacity to surprise:

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Although I have strong differences with several claims made within it, Rowan Williams discusses this point helpfully in his important essay, '[The Body's Grace](#)'.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Leithart, *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press), 4-5.

‘do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit...?’ The body isn’t just claimed for God’s ownership or service, but is presented as a site of his personal residence and of our communion with him. While within my account the body has hitherto featured principally as the objectivity and givenness of the self or as the grounds of its agency, here the ‘exteriority’ of the body is seen to implicate and be entangled with our deepest ‘interiority’.

The Möbius strip-like unity between self and body to which we can be awakened in sexual relations is the basis for the profoundly personal nuptial union. It is not accidental that Paul treats the profound power of bodily union to effect personal union in the verses that immediately precede 1 Corinthians 6:19. As Paul argues in verse 18, sexual relations, as they directly relate to the fundamental reality of our embodiment—of our *being* and not just *having* bodies—implicate the whole person in an especially profound manner. To sexually unite with someone is to be personally united to them in an enduring fashion. The body isn’t just an *instrument* of sexual pleasure, but a means of self-donation, personal union and communion. Because of the personal character of the body, through their bodily interactions persons can commune with and indwell each other.

Against the background of false sexual union, Paul articulates the union that the people of God share with Christ, comparing it both to nuptial union, the relation between bodily members and the unity of the body to which they belong, and the divine inhabitation of a temple. While appearing quite distinct, there is considerable conceptual and metaphorical traffic between

these images in Pauline thought and in biblical thought more generally. Architectural imagery is used interchangeably with organic imagery (e.g. compare Ephesians 2:21-22 with 4:15-16, or the fusion of the two in 1 Peter 2:5) and both of these are related to nuptial imagery. We are the body of Christ—and, as such, the temple of the Holy Spirit—but this relationship is also a nuptial one between a husband and bride.

The temple always had both bodily and nuptial overtones. It was the site of fertility (the threshing floor, see, e.g. Ruth 3) and the Most Holy Place was a sort of [nuptial chamber](#), where God communed with his bride. The temple/tabernacle was also a kind of body (which also corresponds to the vestiture of the high priest). [Vern Poythress](#) presents a compelling argument for this, remarking upon the correspondence between the Most Holy Place and the head of the body, which contained the tablets of the Law, the Holy Place and the trunk of the body (containing five tables and five lampstands on each side, corresponding to our two hands and their fingers), the altar as the grounding for the feet, the two great pillars of Jachin and Boaz as the feet, and the laver or sea representing the procreative organs and the waters of birth (born aloft by twelve bulls corresponding to the sons of Israel).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Note also the living water that flows out from the base of Ezekiel's prophetic temple and from the womb/heart of the one who believes in Christ in John 7:38. I might quibble with certain of the ways that Poythress frames the relation (e.g. the Most Holy Place probably relates more broadly to the most inward parts, rather than narrowly to the head), but the fundamental shape of the analogy is a sound one.

There are reasons to associate the temple closely with the people as God's bride. The temple is 'built' as Eve was in Genesis 2:22 (note the [presence of other architectural language](#) in that context). The temple represents the people as the bride of the Lord. It is associated with symbolism of rebirth in the laver and Sea. In Revelation 21, the bride—the 'holy city', the 'tabernacle of God'—descends from heaven for God to take up residence in her. More generally, it is the woman's body that is most especially suited for such communion and indwelling.

This chapter may seem to have strayed far from the subject of baptism. What I have sought to establish is the significance of personal embodiment and the body as the site of 'one flesh' personal union and communion. The body isn't just the objectivity of the self in the sense of a substrate, nor the self's intimate instrument, but it *is* the self in the Möbius strip of interiority and exteriority and union with the body is union with the person.<sup>16</sup>

Paul refers to baptism's washing and consecration of us in Christ and by the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:11, shortly before referring to our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. In setting apart our bodies through the waters of baptism, our bodies are marked with the seal of the Spirit's indwelling. Just as the Spirit descended upon the tabernacle and Temple, upon the Temple of Christ's body at his baptism, and upon the temple of the Church at the baptism of Pentecost, so the descent of the Spirit upon the temple of our bodies is sealed in baptism. The

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<sup>16</sup> The body is not the self in an undifferentiated manner, but in a membered yet integrated and unified one. Nor is every member or function equally or as directly implicated in our 'interiority'.

temple was a macrocosmic body; our bodies are a microcosmic temple.

Baptism also has nuptial meaning in Ephesians 5:25-27; through baptism the Church is consecrated and cleansed as Christ's bride. This is true for the body of the Church as a whole as the bride of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit. It is also something that each individual baptized Christian participates in. Just as the lover relates to the beloved in their embodiment, addressing the person in the body, so in baptism God declares his love for us and summons us to faithfulness to him precisely in our embodiment. Whatever our bodies look like, whatever frailty, disease, or disability they may experience, whatever we have done with and to them in the past, however others may have violated them, whatever bodily shame we might bear: in baptism God declares that he values, delights in, and is committed to our bodies, that he loves us in our embodiment. God's claim upon our limbs and organs—the claim I discussed in the previous chapter—is the claim of love.

Looking back to the beginning of this enquiry, it should be clear that we have moved a great distance from the notion of baptism as the outward expression of an internal subjective state. In the process of describing the meaning of baptism, I have sketched the lineaments of an anthropology. I also hope that I have exposed something of the wonder of the truth of salvation manifested in baptism. Within baptism we encounter a rich word of divine grace: our bodies are redeemed by Christ, to be offered to him as limbs and organs, established as the temple of his Holy Spirit, delighted in by God as our embodiment, and set apart for the honour and glory of

resurrection on the last day. In baptism God addresses these truths to our bodies themselves, so that the voice of his declaration of liberty might ring throughout the entirety of our being.

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