

# **Temple or Temporal<sup>1</sup>?**

**The Spirituality of the Body**

**by**

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<sup>1</sup> relating to worldly affairs; secular

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## Introduction

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

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*

*Genesis 1:27, 31.*

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

*Ps 139:13, 14.*

*The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

*John 1:14.*

When my Spiritual Director asked me what metaphor would I use to describe my body, a previously ignored door was pushed open. Until then my body was something I somewhat reluctantly inhabited. I saw it as just a temporary dwelling place ultimately to become dust to dust, ashes to ashes, so the 'new creation', beyond decay, could be given. The lip service I paid to holism - the integration of body, mind and spirit - was not lived experientially. And yet, if I believed the Bible, my body was something God had uniquely created in his image, **now**. It was something God loved and wanted me to experience abundant life in. God himself became flesh and blood in Jesus, and moved into the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> What did this mean? What could the body teach me about my relationship with God and how he wanted me to be in his world? I wondered how other Christians thought and felt about this.<sup>3</sup> And so the research topic, 'the spirituality of the body', was 'born'.

I also hoped that others, who had not previously considered the bodily aspect of God's creation and indwelling, would be stimulated to examine this incarnation for themselves. This, indeed, proved to be the case. A wealth of material was forthcoming from participants' generous responses to the questions asked. It is beyond the scope of this research project to examine all the fascinating data that emerged.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the key findings are briefly described and discussed. From these outcomes, recommendations that may assist Spiritual Directors when working with the spirituality of the body are offered.

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<sup>2</sup> John 1: 14, The Message

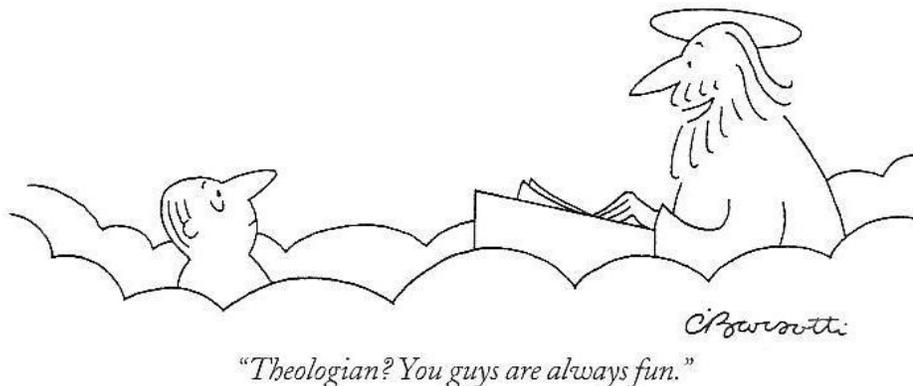
<sup>3</sup> The interweaving of mind, body and spirit is not, of course, limited to Christianity, but this context was my focus.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed descriptive analysis of the responses to each question can be found in Appendix 3.

## Literature Review

A search for literature on this topic revealed few resources that dealt directly and helpfully with the topic of body spirituality. The material that was available differed considerably in approach. Theological perspectives on the tension between the “good” soul and the “evil” body varied, according to the author. Primarily based on Paul’s writings in Romans 8, the interpretation of ‘the flesh’ appeared to be the main determinant of a positive or negative approach to the body. Dallas Willard,<sup>5</sup> while presenting much thoughtful and helpful material including the insight that *the body lies right at the center of the spiritual life*, nevertheless claims *the inclinations to wrongdoing that literally inhabit its parts must be eliminated*. A contrary opinion is held by J. Philip Newell<sup>6</sup> who considers that ‘the flesh’ refers to the sinful tendency in us to disregard our inmost self. It is in our bodies that we are to live, connected to our true self, made in God’s image. *The invitation [living according to the spirit] is to be liberated, to be reconciled to what is deepest in us instead of being held in bondage to what is false in us.*

Newell’s approach to the body is consistent with the Creation model of spiritual growth, Willard’s with the Purgative stage of the Classical Model. Other models of spiritual growth are also open to both positive and negative approaches to the role of the body in the spiritual journey. This diversity in approach and a lack of clear teaching from the Church are evident in participants’ responses to the questionnaire.



Other literature that did not directly relate to theology or models of spiritual growth included therapeutic interventions based on the wisdom of the body, namely Bioenergetics and Focusing. This approach is found in both secular and Christian literature.<sup>7</sup> There were also useful works on times of transition, sexuality, cultural influences, and rituals or meditations that would promote a bodily receptivity to God’s Spirit at work within us.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Willard D., *Renovation of the Heart*, (2002), Chapter 9, Transforming the Body, Navpress, Colorado Springs.

<sup>6</sup> Newell J.P., *Echo of the Soul*, (2000), p. xiii, Morehouse Publishing, PA.

<sup>7</sup> See Brown L; Campbell P. & McMahon E; Gendlin E; Lowen A; in Bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> See Barger L; Rupp J, ; Whitehead E & J; Wuellner F; in Bibliography.

## Methodology

A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was used to address the research question. Initially a pilot questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was completed by seven volunteers of mixed gender, age and exposure to spiritual direction. In light of their responses and further reading, the questionnaire was both simplified and extended, repetitive questions removed, and the space for answers reduced (see Appendix 2). The revised questionnaire was then made available to contacts through Spiritual Growth Ministries, two local churches (Baptist and Anglican) and anyone else who was interested. To ensure the confidentiality of responses, stamped addressed envelopes were provided as well as secure questionnaire response boxes at the churches. Two participants requested the questionnaire be sent by email and replied by the same medium. Fifty-seven responses to the questionnaire were received, 56 of which are included in the data (see Table 1). (For discussion of the questionnaire not included, see Appendix 4, No 35).

**Table 1** Demographic distribution of respondents N56

Age	Gender		Total
	M	F	
20-29	2	5	7
30-39	3	6	9
40-49	7	8	15
50-59	6	7	13
60+	3	9	12
	<b>21</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>56</b>

Each question was examined in detail (see Appendix 3). Answers to each question were individually analysed using a colour code to group the answers under emerging themes. The data obtained was then synthesized to draw out wider patterns that addressed the topic of the Spirituality of the Body in a more generic way. It was also necessary to look at each questionnaire received as a whole to establish individual patterns of response and examine the factors of age and gender.

## Outcomes

Respondents' answers are summarized question-by-question in Appendix Three. Four dominant influences which helped shape respondents' views and understanding of the Spirituality of the Body emerged from responses to the questionnaire. These were:

- Stages of spiritual journey
- Personality
- Cultural context
- Health Status

In the interests of simplicity the themes will now be discussed separately, although they often came together in individually unique patterns.

## **Stages of Spiritual Journey**

The questionnaire addressed only the participants' understanding and experience of the spirituality of the body. From some of the responses given, however, it was possible to discern which model of spirituality was most applicable to the individual's spiritual journey. Likewise, on occasions, an answer could be sorted into a probable stage on that journey. Naturally, some of the responses would fit comfortably within two or three of the models discussed.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Classical Model**

The Purgative way was often indicated for individuals with a negative body image, associated with a perceived need to discipline its inclinations to wrongdoing. For these respondents the body was seen mostly as a functional tool.

Where there was a deeper bodily engagement, God was experienced in an awareness of rest, contentment, peace and relief, illustrative of the Illuminative way.

One respondent demonstrated a sense of being united with God in the Perfective Way when noting: *a sense of love for God flows from deep within my soul out to others.*

### **Creation-Centred Model**

The creation-centred model of spirituality was evident in those respondents who saw God as a creative energy. These participants emphasized the original blessing of God in the creation of humankind rather than seeing the body as primarily manifesting human sinfulness. Responses that saw humanity 'made in the image of God' as referring to our bodies as well as our spirits, fitted comfortably in this model. As in the Classical Model, there were examples of people in each of the four different stages of growth. After an attitude of general thankfulness, seeing the body as a pleasing part of creation (stage one), respondents in stage two were able to recognise a dichotomy and live with the perfect and imperfect: *I try to be at peace with what cannot change or is inevitable.* Stage three was revealed in participants who identified the emergence of a new creativity in living, a new way of being. The last stage of this model calls for a transforming of attitude to one of personal and universal healing, compassion and justice. This transcendent approach was found in a few responses, particularly to the question, 'What are some of the ways I can bring my body to peace and strength in God?'

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<sup>9</sup> For a full illustration of interpreting data through Stages of the Spiritual Journey see Appendix 5.

## **Stages of Faith (Fowler)**

Our spiritual journey is also related to physical, intellectual and emotional development. Each interacts with the other and provides the context in which we grow individually. Fowler's six Stages of Faith<sup>10</sup> together with Erickson's eight stages of human development,<sup>11</sup> provide a helpful framework for viewing the spiritual journey holistically. The participants' range of ages enabled responses to be analysed from the stages of Adolescence to Middle Adulthood. It is important to notice that the successful completion of the tasks inherent in each stage rather than age by itself enabled respondents to move on to another stage. Thus how the spirituality of the body was understood and experienced by the participants was dependent on both their emotional and spiritual maturity. The greater the maturity, the more evident the positive integration of body, mind and spirit was in the answers given.

## **Personality**

When individual questionnaires were viewed in totality, differences in personality traits were often demonstrated, independently of other factors. People who viewed life more concretely were apt to describe their body in a factual or functioning fashion (the senses or anatomical characteristics), while those who saw life in terms of patterns or concepts were wider ranging in their descriptions. This approach or understanding tended to be repeated consistently within the answers of each individual.

Those respondents with a more practical approach emphasized the physical nature of God's attitude to their bodies and their physical responsibilities in caring for it: *It was designed for a purpose – to be used in the world for basic living but also to enable us to work for God. God wants me to look after my body with good food, plenty of rest and sleep and be safe in what I do in my daily life.*

They tended to see their life and identity in terms of being able to physically perform their roles. God was bodily experienced through physical sensations, especially exercise, and tangible accomplishments. Ways of bringing their bodies to peace and strength in God generally included caring for it, using it to do his work: *being the hands and feet of God*, prayer, and reading the Scriptures. Some did not answer or had difficulty in responding to the later more interpretive questions of the questionnaire: *I find this a difficult area to comment on.*

Respondents with a more abstract orientation understood God's attitude to their bodies in terms of a gift, made in His image, a temple, a masterpiece of his creative work. How this was reflected in their lives included an attitude of thankfulness, enjoyment, love and care. Particularly in the mature, life, identity and the body were seen as inextricably interwoven. For these people God tended to be experienced in the mind and emotions as well as in physical enjoyment of his provision. Peace and strength were primarily found through prayer, meditation, care (including addressing emotional issues), and focusing on God.

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<sup>10</sup> For a brief outline of Fowler's Stages of Faith see Appendix 6.

<sup>11</sup> For a complete list of Erickson's stages of human development see Appendix 7.

For a comparison of two mothers in similar domestic situations (pre-school children and a baby) which illustrates the above observations, see Appendix 9.

Another area of evident personality difference in interpreting the spirituality of the body involved a head rather than a heart approach. When the head dominated, God was experienced primarily in the mind, both in using the intellect and hearing his voice. There was little connection with God's presence in the body: *spirituality for me is something more intellectualized than experienced through my body*. Gender had some bearing here, males being more likely to respond in this way. For those respondents with a heart approach, God was more likely to be experienced through feelings: *laughter, love, peacefulness, unsubstantiated joy, stillness, exhilaration, tears, holistic refreshment, removal of fear*.

One respondent noted the effect of two personality traits for himself: *I had a dream recently encouraging me to more fully 'incarnate' my whole body. As a strong introvert I tend to inhabit my head. There was a strong invitation to move out to the edges of my skin – it was very tactile!*

## **Cultural Influences**

The impression, often given by Western Christianity, that there is a tension between the “good” soul and the “sinful” body<sup>12</sup> was implicit in the responses given by several participants. A desire to conform to the Western ideal body image was also a tangible influence. Being over-weight or unfit, aging changes, and how they appeared to other people, were all identified as sources of concern. Where such concerns were present, they were found in both males and females of all ages but three females (of varying age) specifically noted the need to avoid being shaped by the media image of what is a beautiful female body.

Images or words that came to mind when these respondents thought of their bodies were negative: *Body image, status, figure; A bit overweight; Bad, ugly; Out of shape, worry;* as was the meaning associated with the words: *Negative meanings; Many of them are contradictory which represents the thoughts and feelings I have about my body. On one hand is the worldly perspective in which I feel lacking and worried. On the other is the biblical view of it, which sees it more as a gift and a tool for this time on earth.* Their life and identity were therefore negatively correlated in some way with their body: *My image of my body reflects my image of myself and is tied up with frustration in other areas of my life; My personality is affected by how I look – confidence or lack of.*

For people tangibly influenced by Western culture, even when the body was positively regarded, it tended to be in terms of its function and appearance. Lilian Barger<sup>13</sup> suggests *because we associate beauty with transcendent values like justice and virtue, we tend to see those who are considered physically attractive as more valuable, smarter and more successful (p.41)*. Conversely, being overweight was associated with a lack of self-control and aestheticism. In his book **The Jesus I Never Knew**, Philip Yancey comments on the adverse reaction to a pudgy BBC actor portraying Christ. He suggests that our need to “see” Jesus as *tall, handsome, and,*

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<sup>12</sup> Willard D. Renovation of the Heart, (2002), Navpress, Colorado Springs

<sup>13</sup> Barger L. Eve's Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body, (2003), Brazos Press, Michigan

*above all, slender (p87) is more about us than about him. Small wonder overweight respondents of both genders and any age saw themselves as less “Christ-like” than their fit, well-shaped counterparts.*

While most respondents who were negative about their bodies were also clear that God made, accepted and loved their bodies, God’s attitude appeared to have little influence or outworking in their lives:

*In my head I know that I am created by God – beautiful, valuable and that my body is the vehicle He uses to express care, love and service:*

**But:** [How is this reflected in my life] *I keep it clean! Exercise often. Try to make it as presentable as possible! ... It is not my favourite part of me.*

[God’s attitude to my body] *good – doesn’t care about appearance cares more about who I am than what I look like.*

**But:** *My personality is effected [sic] by how I look – confidence or lack of.*

*God has created me, and loves me the way he created me.*

**But:** *How I feel about myself emotionally (self-esteem etc.) is tied up with my internal identity of my body. If my body is not what I am happy with, then this is reflected in other areas of my life and how I react to other people and different situations.*

However, some respondents, particularly in the older age groups (who had successfully completed developmental tasks or who were at a different stage of faith) had escaped the pervasiveness of Western mores: [the body is] *Something to be looked after and enjoyed. A very precious and unique part of who I am; Temple, place/vehicle of encounter with God; My femaleness, my face, my age, this is who I am – this is what God looks like; I’m made in the image of God – a mystery that somehow includes my physical body, but is more than my body; As I have grown older, I have come to see my body less as a point of failure, and more as part of my aging and wiser persona; God loves, cares and accepts my uniqueness – whether I’m fat/thin, young/old, able or disabled in any way. His love remains constant.*

## **Health**

Whatever the age or gender, where physical dis-ease dominated, the spirituality of the body was a potential source of pain. For six respondents who suffered ill health, disability or infertility, images or words used to describe their bodies included: *a problem, a hindrance, weighs me down; sore, disfigured, imperfect; damaged, diseased, pain-ridden.*

How they interpreted God’s attitude reflected the struggle:

*God made my body. I think he likes it, but I can’t understand why he didn’t make it so it would work; I have a sneaking suspicion he does not think much of it because I have had so much illness.*

Others were more positive in approach:

*I think he is sad it is the way it is, but is also using it to teach me many things I wouldn't have learnt otherwise. He has made some parts beautiful though and I guess he's proud of those and loves it because of my individuality;*

*That he loves it and wants me to take care of it. That he knows it has limitations. I have often experienced great physical weakness at the times of greatest spiritual strength.*

The effect on life and identity varied from ... *having a life ruled by disease and medications; a reticence and reluctance to be pro-active, fearing sickness;*

*and a difference in how one can worship God ... perhaps closer when my body has failed me; when sore etc. it is often hard to think of God;*

*to ... very much of what I've learnt in my life is because of the body I have. Without it I think I would be quite a different person.*

Respondents attempted to find bodily peace and strength in different ways. Caring for the body and accepting its limitations and imperfections was advocated by two people; one person found solace by meditating on scripture or walking in nature; another noted the need to care for it but was also comforted by the promise of a new body in heaven; while one young woman had tried presenting her body to God, being anointed with oil, but most of the time tried to work around her body's weaknesses and pray through the pain.

Another respondent noted:

*I have found my emotions have affected my health – I have been very ill at times, but as I've learnt to trust God is sovereign in all – my health has improved. Being born again has been the beginning of healing in all areas – body, mind and soul.*

As is apparent, the spirituality of the body presented a special challenge to people with health problems. However, as with cultural influences, a more accepting and positive approach was generally discernible in those who were at a later stage in their spiritual journey.

## **Conclusion**

The questionnaire asked people to consider how they viewed their bodies and what meaning that view held for them. In describing what they believed was God's attitude to their bodies they were invited to compare and, if different, contrast the two attitudes and discern which was reflected in their lives. Respondents were then challenged to think about ways in which their life and identity were interwoven with their body. The attitude or belief about their body was thus checked out experientially. In question five people were asked about God's intimate, physical relationship with them and how this was manifest. The final question encouraged people to integrate their responses to the preceding questions into a personal resource for enhancing the lived experience of body spirituality.

As one would expect, people's responses varied considerably according to their personality, the model of spiritual growth they related to, and where they were on their spiritual journey. For those with a well-developed spiritual awareness, and/or who related to a Creation-centred

spirituality, responses tended to be positive and reflected a greater integration of mind, body and soul. For these people, body-image was less dependent on the mirror and others' reactions and seen more as an accepted aspect of self, created and indwelt by God. They demonstrated a greater awareness of grace, restoration and being united with God in love.

Where there was a self-condemning or externally sensitive approach, respondents tended to see their bodies as needing to be disciplined or merely as a functional tool for performing God's purposes in the world. Their answers also revealed the importance of belonging and acceptance – they were concerned about how they appear physically to others. These answers were given despite the overwhelming awareness that God himself was positive in his attitude to their bodies, ie. there was a discernible discrepancy between theological 'belief' and personal attitude.

In terms of age, developmental issues had some influence on body image, those in the older age groups tending to become more accepting of what 'is'. Often, but not necessarily, those who were older were also more advanced in their spiritual journey. Interestingly it was noticeable that respondents connected with Spiritual Growth Ministries or Spiritual Direction tended to have a more developed and confident view of body spirituality than those from 'ordinary' church congregations.<sup>14</sup>

Both personality and health status also had a significant effect on how individuals viewed their bodies and the spirituality (or otherwise) of the body. For those of a more concrete approach, the spirituality of the body was often a new idea. For those with health problems, a positive view of their bodies was difficult and this difficulty was reflected in their understanding of the relevance of body spirituality. For others, particularly those who relate more to "the heart", it was an exciting and rewarding area to explore and grow in.

The different theological perspectives, lack of effective teaching in the church, personality and health issues, and the prevailing Western cultural influence make the spirituality of the body a challenging area for Christians. People who were interested enough to be involved in this research revealed widely differing understandings of the concept and the relevance of it for their lives. This was especially evident for respondents for whom God's attitude to their bodies was perceived as positive and inclusive (espoused theology), but this belief was not being lived out experientially (operative theology). The research outcomes suggest this tension between theological understanding and actual experience is a fruitful area for spiritual directors to explore with directees to assist them in finding the fullness of life - body, mind and spirit, promised by Jesus. I have certainly found it so.

## **Recommendations**

As with all aspects of spiritual direction, directors need to be aware of the directee's context if they are to work together on the spirituality of the body. Journeying in this area, as in any other, depends on movement within the directee and the outworking of God's grace. However, as noted, this research suggests it may be useful for directees to have their attention explicitly

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<sup>14</sup> Questionnaires sent out to SGM members had a different return date and were therefore clearly identifiable.

drawn towards their bodies to help promote the integration of mind, body and spirit into a God-experienced whole (see Appendix 3, No 31). The director may therefore choose to initiate discussion where they sense spirituality of the body could be a positive area for growth in the directee.

The following is a short list of suggested ways and resources, in addition to those skills already present in the director, which could be of use in exploring and resolving issues of the spirituality of the body. Ways of bringing their bodies to peace and strength in God, suggested by participants in the research are included.

### **Stages of development and spiritual journey**

An understanding of developmental issues will be helpful in assisting the directee to recognise the developmental tasks associated with their age and spiritual understanding. If developmental or faith tasks at one stage have not been positively resolved, directees will find it difficult to successfully complete the next stage. It may be necessary for the director to assist them in evaluating their journey to date and support them as they attend to an incomplete earlier stage. An appreciation of the journey involved may be particularly helpful at mid-life when people can become distressed to find old ways of being or believing are no longer satisfying or 'fit'. There are several publications on navigating midlife available of which Joyce Rupp's *Dear Heart, Come Home*<sup>15</sup> is particularly useful. Helpful midlife courses are also run by various Christian organizations including Emmaus (Wellington). Where aging is proving a challenge, Pauline O'Regan has written a highly entertaining and thoughtful book, *Miles to Go*.<sup>16</sup>

Spiritual directors can provide guidance, encouragement and support for the directee's ongoing growth by being aware of different spiritual models and the stages involved. Such support is particularly important during difficult points of transition. Another book by Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes*,<sup>17</sup> may be helpful either for the directee to read or as a source of reflective questions for the director to companion the directee through. It contains an extensive section of prayers, scripture readings and reflections for particular times of transition.

Where directees wish to consider different theological perspectives of the body (the flesh), Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*,<sup>18</sup> and J. Philip Newell, *Echo of the Soul*<sup>19</sup> are helpful modern readings.

### **Personality**

Both the Myers Briggs Personality Indicator (MBTI) and the Enneagram offer excellent insights into personality differences and contribute to an understanding of strengths and weaknesses in pursuing developmental and spiritual growth. Courses are run regularly in most main centres. The MBTI course is available from both secular and Christian trainers while Catholic centres usually provide workshops on the Enneagram.

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<sup>15</sup> Rupp J. *Dear Heart, Come Home: The path of Mid-life Spirituality* (1998), Morehouse Publishing, USA

<sup>16</sup> O'Regan P. *Miles to Go: A book to make you laugh out loud* (2004), Penguin, Auckland.

<sup>17</sup> Rupp J. *Praying Our Goodbyes: The Spirituality of Change* (1988), Eagle Publishing, UK

<sup>18</sup> Willard D. *Renovation of the Heart* (2002), Navpress, Colorado Springs

<sup>19</sup> Newell J.P. *Echo of the Soul* (2000), Morehouse Publishing, PA

## Cultural influences

Useful reading, particularly for women, which addresses the affect of Western culture on our thinking about our bodies includes Lilian Barger, *Eve's Revenge*<sup>20</sup> and Flora Wuellner, *Prayer and Our Bodies*.<sup>21</sup> Flora Wuellner's book includes meditations and prayers that can be used with individuals or groups.

## Health

Joyce Rupp's, *Praying our Goodbyes* has several prayers and meditations that minister to different areas of inner healing. Flora Wuellner also addresses 'relating to our bodies in illness and disability' and 'letting our bodies pray'. Listening to the body and befriending it to hear its wisdom is the particular approach of Focusing. Lynne Brown<sup>22</sup> of SGM has written an excellent research project, *An introduction to focusing and its use in spiritual direction*, which gives a clear overview and references. The generic text is Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*.<sup>23</sup> Focusing has application for enhancing body spirituality for certain directees, regardless of health issues. Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul*, also addresses the importance of listening to the messages of the body.

## General

Interactive Drawing Therapy can be a useful way of encouraging directees to move into 'right brain' where unrecognized attitudes to the body may lie. It is also a useful medium for promoting self insight and growth. Courses are run in main centres.

Email: [idt@pl.net](mailto:idt@pl.net) Web page: [www.InteractiveDrawingTherapy.com](http://www.InteractiveDrawingTherapy.com).

Applying Lectio Divina to appropriate scriptural passages will obviously be helpful for those directees who find meditating on the Scriptures especially beneficial. Thelma Hall, in her book *Too deep for Words*,<sup>24</sup> identifies 50 themes in scripture many of which are relevant to an understanding of the spirituality of the body (eg. compassion, forgiveness, God in our midst).

Sexuality is closely related to spirituality for many people. While the research revealed only positive responses in this area, anecdotally some people find sexuality a difficult issue to put in a Christian context. Evelyn and James Whitehead's *Wisdom of the Body: Making Sense of Our Sexuality*,<sup>25</sup> is an excellent resource and includes a section on celibacy.

Some of the ways respondents suggested would be or were helpful to bringing their bodies to peace and strength in God were: caring, respecting, listening to and accepting their bodies including exploring their limited awareness of it; maintaining a strong relationship with God through worship, prayer, solitude, stillness, silence, contemplation, reading the Scriptures and giving thanks; taking responsibility for their own well-being (ie. being prepared to work at issues of emotional needs and greater integration); performing acts of service; and generally relaxing with healthy activity, reading and/or specific techniques such as visualization. As can be seen from the above, answers to questions such as 'What are some of the ways I can bring my body to peace and strength in God?' can provide a platform for the director to work appropriately with

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<sup>20</sup> Barger L, *Eve's Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body* (2003), Brazos Press, Grand Rapids

<sup>21</sup> Wuellner F.S. *Prayer and Our Bodies* (1987), Upper Room Books, Tennessee

<sup>22</sup> Brown L. Unpublished manuscript (2002), Spiritual Directors Formation Programme, SGM.

<sup>23</sup> Gendlin E.T. *Focusing* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) (1981), Bantam Books, New York

<sup>24</sup> Hall T. *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (1988), Paulist Press, New Jersey

<sup>25</sup> Whitehead E. & J. *Wisdom of the Body* (2001), The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York

directees (ie. from their responses the stage of faith journey, personality, cultural influences and any health issues may well be discerned and explored).

Several participants noted how helpful the questionnaire had been in directing their attention to how they experience God in their bodies (see Appendix 3, No 31). For some, like me, they had not consciously considered the body as a way in which God relates and speaks to us or as a way of experiencing the indwelling and pleasure of God. For others, it revealed uncomfortable discrepancies between what they knew to be God's attitude (eternal) and the secular (temporal) beliefs that had actually come to influence their lives. In addition, personality, developmental tasks, and the stage of their spiritual journey all had an influence on how they related to the spirituality of the body. There is a treasure trove of insights to uncover here. Differing theological perspectives and an absence of informed teaching within the church contribute to a lack of knowledge and awareness of the inter-relationship between mind, body and spirit. Addressing the spirituality of the body has a great potential to widen, deepen and broaden our relationship with God and with ourselves. As noted previously, this research project suggests the spirituality of the body is a promising area for spiritual directors to proactively explore with their directees by sensitively inviting them to respond to questions that will, perhaps, open a previously ignored door. As in all companioning, it will first of all require directors to explore these issues for themselves, perhaps by answering the questionnaire!

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## Epilogue

The following is an epilogue which encapsulates the context and central tenet of this research project on the Spirituality of the Body.

### *Incarnation*

*Medicine has said, "The body is a machine,  
cells organised by genes and nutrition.  
It often needs repair."  
The Church has said, "The body is a sin,  
frail, a burden to the spiritual life.  
It must be subjugated."  
Philosophers have said, "The body  
is the servant of mental processes.  
We think therefore we are."  
The market place has said, "The body  
is big business, to be measured in dollars.  
We sell it beauty and youth.  
The body says, "Listen to me!  
I am the supreme gift of the divine.  
I am the miracle of love made by love.  
I am celebration! I am dance!  
I am the pleasure of God."<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> Cowley J. [Psalms for the Road](#) (2002), Catholic Supplies, NZ

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Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the NIV.