

## Introduction: Return to the Body

This book originated in a course I taught at Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, in June 2014. I was invited to offer an intensive course in liturgy by Danny Salim, dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts, to undergraduate church music students; he also invited pastors to attend the course. One reason for my retirement from parish ministry at the end of June 2013 (at the age of seventy) was to be available for just these kinds of invitations. So I said yes.

Since this was a department of performing arts rather than theology, I decided to teach the course from the perspective of the body engaged in liturgy and worship, since performing artists use their bodies to communicate. Musicians use their bodies to sing or play instruments. Dancers and actors use their bodies to tell stories or to communicate emotion. Likewise, pastors need to be more mindful of the use of their bodies in their leadership roles in the liturgy. Physically present before the assembly or congregation, they move from one location to another in the worship space. They use gestures and postures. They read Scripture, preach sermons, offer prayers, and administer sacraments. Sometimes they chant or lead singing; sometimes they touch people with the laying on of hands. Worship leaders are constantly using their bodies in a public and visible way. As such, they need to be comfortable with their bodily presence. Discomfort shows, calling attention to itself in ways that distract from the people's worship. Lack of a sense of

bodily presence includes self-conscious actions, awkward gestures, sloppy postures, and slovenly dress.

With the body as a primary focus, I prepared a course that included basic introductory material on liturgy. In order of appearance the chapters in this book address liturgical theology, daily prayer offices, liturgical calendar, sacraments and sacramental theology, vestments, ritual studies, words and eucharistic meals, fasting and feasting, penitential rites and festivals, rites of passage, inculturation, architecture and art, music, drama, and performance theory. Some of these topics are covered in my *Introduction to Christian Liturgy*, and I will make reference to that book for greater detail on those topics.<sup>1</sup> On other topics, however, I go well beyond that introduction as we explore the role of the body in liturgy, worship, and devotion.

As far as possible, this course was taught from the perspective of the body. I had never before taught a liturgy course from this perspective, but by what other means do we worship God than with our bodies? Unfortunately, many Protestants seem to have forgotten this reality. I believe that the renewal of worship requires a return to the body as the vehicle of worship.

The course was attended by church music students in the Faculty (Department) of Performing Arts of Satya Wacana Christian University, Indonesian pastors from throughout Indonesia (Java, Sumatra, Borneo), and auditors from the performing arts faculty. I had never before taught such a spectrum of students at different levels in one classroom. Moreover, translators recruited from the Faculties of Performing Arts, Language, and Theology were present in each class session. I had never taught a course that required simultaneous translation. I was honored that the rector of the university, Dr. John A. Titaley, formally inaugurated the course to make it an official offering of Satya Wacana Christian University.

Because of the need for simultaneous translation the lectures all had to be written in advance. This process gave me a literary product to expand upon for this book. The class was held three hours a day

1. Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

for ten days an hour and a half before lunch and another hour and a half after lunch—which explains the parts A and B for each chapter. I edited the lectures to remove classroom directions, to address them to a more general and global audience, and to elaborate on some ideas that I discussed extemporaneously in the classroom. Wanting to be as comprehensive as possible, I added lessons on youth rites (baptism of infants and youth, confirmation and affirmation of baptism), healing rites (churching of women, ministry to the sick, exorcism), and marriage and burial rites, which I did not cover in the course for lack of time (although I touched on some of these practices in passing). Since these lessons originated as classroom lectures, there were questions. I have gathered some of the questions that I recalled at the end of the book. I do not recall any questions after the last session on liturgical performance, but the students and the pastors expressed appreciation for that particular lecture. They said it helped them to appreciate other traditions. By way of conclusion, chapter 12, part B is a greatly expanded version of my closing remarks. The actual last afternoon session was devoted to individual oral exams in which the dean and a translator were present. I asked the students to share with me three ideas from three different lectures that they found interesting and wanted to apply to their work in the church.

I'm grateful that Fortress Press is willing to enable me to share the course through the wider means of this book because I think it will be of interest to many Christians today as we strive to regain a sense of ourselves as bodily creatures with a calling to worship and serve God.

### **The Body in Worship**

The most fundamental thing we can say about ourselves is that we are creatures of the earth. It is an article of faith that among all the creatures of the earth it is human beings who bear the image of God. We are God's representatives in the world. We are also the priests of the world who offer the world to God in a sacrifice of love and praise. We serve these functions by means of our bodily selves. Public worship, which is what liturgy is, is a sensuous experience that involves

speaking and hearing, touching and tasting, seeing and doing, motion and emotion. We cannot participate in liturgical worship apart from the body, and we do so through a variety of movements and postures as well as a script. As we have come to recognize in recent years, worship is more than words. Yet amazingly, few people have given much thought to these basic realities.

In recent and not-so-recent years (in fact, from the beginning of my active ministry in 1969), a concerted effort has been made to make worship more relevant to people where they are. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) of the Second Vatican Council, promulgated in 1963 by Pope Paul VI, calls for more active participation of the people in their liturgy. There is no way for worship to be more relevant to people where they are or to foster their active participation than by engaging them bodily in liturgical rites. The more the senses and postures are used in worship, the more we can individually and collectively connect with what is happening in the liturgy and, in my experience, sense the presence of God. Worship that is focused only on music and preaching, as much of contemporary Protestant worship is, will be sensuously deficient, no matter how loud the music or how engaging the oration, because it doesn't offer sufficient visual, olfactory, taste, and tactile stimulation. Worship in which the worshipers are primarily seated is kinesthetically deficient because the body likes to be up and about—especially young bodies. As parents have known for years, little bodies don't like being hemmed in by wooden benches, and there's no reason they have to be. Nor do they need to be dismissed from the worshiping assembly so that the adults can worship in peace. We need a better understanding of the liturgical assembly as a congregation of the whole people of God, which is comprised of all ages.

The “body” has been treated as a metaphor as well as a physical object. In fact, as Mark Johnson and George Lakoff demonstrate, much of our experience of the physical world, including those experiences that impact our bodies, are conceptualized by use of metaphors.<sup>2</sup> Throughout this book, we will pay attention to some of these

metaphorical uses of the term “body”, such as the eucharistic body, the ecclesial body, and the cultural body, but I would advise against becoming so metaphorical that we lose our connection to actual bodies. For example, the eucharistic body of Christ is (or should be) actual food that literally feeds the physical body (no matter how minimally), entering into the chemistry of our physical bodies to be broken down either for use or elimination (sorry, but it’s true). This meal builds up the church as an assembly (*ekklesia*) of many actual bodies. The “body of Christ” is more than a metaphor for the church; it has a physical reality in the physical bodies of its members who constitute the assembly. The cultural body is concretely expressed in how we engage bodily in public rituals, how we interact bodily with one another, how the body is portrayed in visual presentations, and how the body is used physically to make music, dance, and perform plays.

As a graduate student at Oxford University in the summer term of 1968, I studied the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets and discovered the Anglican divine, mystic, and poet Thomas Traherne (1637-74), whose work has been known only since the beginning of the twentieth century. Living on the cusp of the Enlightenment (he was a contemporary of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke), Traherne delighted in the world of nature and the human body within the natural world. In a poem entitled *The Person*, he writes:

The Naked Things  
 Are most Sublime, and Brightest shew,  
 When they alone are seen:  
 Mens Hands then Angels Wings  
 Are truer Wealth even here below:  
 For those but seem  
 Their Worth they then do best reveal,  
 When we all Metaphores remove,  
 For Metaphores conceal,  
 And only Vapours prove.  
 They best are Blazond when we see

2. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

## EMBODIED LITURGY

The Anatomie,  
Survey the Skin, cut up the Flesh, the Veins  
Unfold: The Glory there remains.  
The Muscles, Fibres, Arteries and Bones  
Are better far then Crowns and precious Stones.<sup>3</sup>

As I deal with the body in worship I want to explore the actual body that God created to serve him. I have scoured liturgical and paraliturgical rites to find ways in which the body is actually engaged in ritual acts. The images scattered throughout this book include some of the more unusual uses of the body in worship as well as cultural portrayals of Christ's body, as discussed in the chapters that follow.

In my particular case, there is an autobiographical facet to the idea of a "return to the body." My "return to the body" came about when I underwent surgery for colon cancer in August 2006 and then received chemotherapy for most of a year. The chemo protocol was devastating to my normal functioning, and I gave up trying to live and work as if nothing were happening to my body and as if what was happening to my body didn't affect my mind. I began to pay attention to everything that was happening to my body. I also found myself mentally reviewing my life in my body during long afternoon rest periods on the sofa. I began to remember how much I used my body when I was a youth performing in the elementary school boys' gymnastics show, in children's operettas, and in piano recitals. I conducted the high school orchestra in the national anthem in school assemblies, took part in native American dancing in Boy Scout summer camp, and climbed mountains and canoed lakes in the Adirondacks of upstate New York. I reflected on how my use of my body diminished as I grew older and how I increasingly utilized only my mind in my academic and pastoral work. But I also considered how my boyhood experiences of public performance contributed to my sense of ease as a leader of public ritual. In addition, my spiritual and religious development in late adolescence helped me find more ways to use my body, particularly my senses and postures, in worship. This explains my early

3. Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), II, 24-25.

interest in ritual and liturgical action. In a sense, my early interests got sidetracked as I became involved in the work of liturgical revision in the 1970s, which was primarily text-centered. In practice as a parish pastor, however, I never forgot the importance of choreography in the liturgy or how liturgical ministers were presenting themselves bodily to the worshipers. We have not given as much attention to these aspects of liturgical leadership as we should have. Therefore I welcome this opportunity to return to the body as a primary liturgical focus.

As I rebounded from the effects of chemotherapy I also needed to rehabilitate my body through exercise. In an active older adults class at the YMCA I discovered yoga, and as I explored this practice, combined with massage therapy, I learned more about my body than I ever knew before. As I prepared this course, I thought about how helpful it would be if the participants were also able to get more in touch with their own bodies. We cannot talk about “embodiment” of liturgy and worship without actually getting into our bodies. Besides, I thought the undergraduates could use some “stretch time” in the course of a three-hour class—and it wouldn’t hurt the pastors either.

### **An Apology for Yoga**

For this reason, as I prepared the lectures, I asked Dean Salim about the propriety of engaging the students in some yogic exercises as a way of getting them to give new attention to the use of their bodies. Danny was OK with this and even gave us the recital hall for our classroom so that we could spread out our bodies on the stage. But he advised that I should say something about the use of yoga because some of the students might have heard sermons telling them to stay away from it. Wariness about yoga would not be unusual with Asian Christians, who associate yoga with Hinduism or Buddhism. Moreover, yoga does not yet flourish in Indonesia except among expatriates and tourists in Bali, perhaps because it is a mostly Muslim country. So in my first class session I gave a personal statement regarding my interest in recovering an experience of embodiment through the practice of yoga, as well as a thumbnail sketch of the history of yoga.

As a pastor and theologian I was well aware that some Christian leaders admonish Christians to stay away from yoga because of its roots in Eastern religions. As an orthodox Christian I didn't want to get into much less espouse something that is contrary to Christian beliefs. At the same time there are Hindus in India and America dedicated to "taking back yoga" from its Western and entrepreneurial appropriations and claiming it as a unique Hindu practice. Aware of these concerns, I began a study of the yoga traditions and discovered there are many.<sup>4</sup> As a historian I took a long view of yoga through the millennia and came to understand that yoga represents ancient wisdom about the body, which is rooted in ancient Indian culture. Yoga itself is not a religion; it is about bringing mind and body together. (The word "yoga" means "yoke".) But it has been used in religions. It was systematized in Hinduism (especially Brahmanism) for use in devotion to Hindu gods like Krishna. Yoga was also a discipline used by the Jains to cultivate moral perfection. It was transformed by Buddhism into a spirituality that aided one on the path to enlightenment. There was actually a Muslim embrace of yoga in the Mughal Empire in India in the late sixteenth century. Yoga was used in Tantra, which was a revolt against orthodox Brahmanism, that regarded the body and daily life as a source of reality and flourished among all segments of the population in medieval India, and in Buddhism as well as Hinduism.<sup>5</sup> Tantra views the body as a microcosm of the macrocosm (the universe) and as the location (embodiment) of the Divine, especially the divine feminine. While Tantra became largely an esoteric practice, it contributed to the development of Hatha yoga, which is the most commonly practiced form of yoga in the world today.

Yoga fell on hard times between the end of the Middle Ages and the modern period in India. It was renewed in the early twentieth century under the influence of the Northern European body culture movement,

4. See Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy, and Practice* (Prescott, AZ: Hohm, 2008).

5. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, with a new introduction by David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) and David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

including German calisthenics and Scandinavian gymnastics, which was brought to India during the British Raj.<sup>6</sup> The YMCA generally promoted healthy minds, bodies, and spirits based on the Christian value of healthy living as part of its mission; this was also the case in the Indian YMCA. Indians were looked down upon by British administrators as unfit and unhealthy people. As part of emerging Indian nationalism, gurus like T. Krishnamacharya in southern India and Swami Sivananda in northern India took this criticism seriously and tapped into the physical postures (*asanas*) of Hatha Yoga—a tradition going back to the fifteenth century (although *asanas* had not been widely practiced except as an aid to meditation)—, blending it with Western approaches. As a result, Krishnamacharya, who is regarded as the father of modern yoga, produced a more gymnastic style of yoga not unlike the gymnastics promoted in the Indian YMCA. Students of Krishnamacharya, particularly B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois, also promoted this revitalized Hatha postural yoga in the West. I think a case can be made that the postural yoga practiced by many people around the world today has at least some Christian influence on its development through the values of having fit and healthy bodies, as promoted by the YMCA in India. In the meantime, all kinds of new yoga practices are being developed, such as hot yoga and acro yoga, and yoga has become a truly global phenomenon.

Modern yoga has become mostly an exercise regimen for health-conscious modern people. Even in modern India yoga is valued as much for its health benefits as for its metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> The yoga most Westerners experience is largely shorn of its religious and spiritual dimensions except as allied with New Age spirituality. I don't think it is necessarily a good thing for yoga to lose some of its spiritual and metaphysical aspects. I am interested in more of a dialogue between yoga's classical spiritual traditions and its modern physiological and psychological applications. Thankfully, I found a yoga teacher in

6. See Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

7. See Joseph A. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Nicholas Beem at Grateful Yoga in Evanston, Illinois, who engages in just that kind of dialogue in his teaching.

I built some yogic exercises into some of the sessions of this course. It was pretty simple yoga, consisting of introductory samples. The directions for doing these exercises appear in this book in italics if readers want to do the exercises individually or in a group. In a group situation, someone could read the directions (very slowly) while the group follows them. Those who practice yoga regularly could simply make a list of the *asana* sequences (as is often done in private practice), place it within sight, and go through the poses. I want to note that I am not a yoga teacher; I am simply relating the experience of my own practice. That said, my yoga teacher, Nick Beem, offered mini-courses in yoga cosmology and metaphysics, I received tutorials in tantric practice from the respected Chicago yoga teacher Per Erez, I participated in a weekend workshop given by nationally-known yoga teacher Rod Stryker on “Tantra: Awakening the Sacred Channel”, and I participated in a week-long course on “The Embodied History of Yoga” at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health in Stockbridge, MA taught by Professor David Gordon White and Yoganand Michael Carroll in August 2015. I acknowledge here the assistance of my teachers Nick and Lela Beem (co-owners of Grateful Yoga, Evanston, Illinois) in shaping the sequences and finessing the directions for the yoga exercises included in this book.

### **A New Interdisciplinary Interest in Embodiment**

As I prepared these lectures and then beefed them up after my return from Indonesia, I delved even more deeply into the human body in its various aspects. I was amazed at how much interest there has been in the human body throughout all fields of intellectual inquiry in recent years. I touch on some of these disciplines in this book, beginning with anatomy and biochemistry, but also including philosophy and phenomenology, environmental science and cosmology, incarnational and sacramental theology, ritual studies, cultural studies, architecture, art, music, dance, and drama.

The body is fundamental to human existence. We can ignore neither the biology of the body nor the body's location in the natural world. Our environment also has an effect on the body (as well as an affect in certain seasons). We cannot ignore the physical functions of the body, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, having sex, and dying. Liturgy accounts for all of these somatic—functions a fact that has been underexplored by liturgists.

We also cannot ignore the impact on the body of the belief systems of the societies in which we live—a reality that has been underexplored by theologians. How we function in life is determined to a great extent by religious beliefs and cultural mores. Belief systems that influence bodily behavior vary from unarticulated assumptions derived from the cultures in which we live to ritualized practices and explicit doctrines. Beliefs and values shape the body in many ways, from the stylization of external appearance (including clothing and ornamentation, or no clothing) to the structuring of bodily actions and comportment (including essential practices like eating and fasting) and to inner modes of affect (moods that are felt somatically and that may be cultivated in contrasting liturgical seasons like Lent and Easter). Beliefs about the human body may be systematized in a theology of the body. I found myself studying the teachings of Tantra Yoga while at the same time working through Pope John Paul II's theology of the body. Both are expressions of an incarnational theology and spirituality. They see divinity and the experience of divinity related to the body.

This book deals with embodied liturgy, but the uses of the body in liturgies, paraliturgical devotions, and other rituals are not confined to established ecclesiastical (that is, social) norms; they also include expressions of faith and commitment that are individualistic or even antagonistic to the liturgical mainstream, such as we see in flagellant processions or Mardi Gras parades. More than a mere instrument to be used in the worship of God, the body is also a site and weapon of protest, as we see in art and theater both sacred and profane.

Taking all of this and more into account, attempting to write about the human body, even just in its liturgical use, turned out to be a huge

undertaking. But then liturgy is also a comprehensive reality because it expresses, as I have written elsewhere, nothing less than a worldview.<sup>8</sup> Many have come to see that not only is liturgy connected with the whole of life but it also forms us in a cosmology.<sup>9</sup>

### The Cultural Body

I was privileged to engage in these reflections on the body while living for several weeks in a southeastern Asian social setting, which afforded me an opportunity to compare and contrast the body in my North American cultural context with the less Westernized and predominantly Muslim cultural context of Java—at least in the streets and shops if not as much in the church and university. Among the most evident differences are the five-times daily call to prayer over loudspeakers in the mosques (beginning at 4:15 a.m.), the girls wearing head scarves (even in a Christian university that welcomes Muslim students), and the omnipresence of motorcycles.

Body language is important in all cultures and differs from one culture to another. I experienced the custom of a child greeting an elder (a respected person in the community, a teacher, parents, grandparents, and so on) by taking the elder's offered hand and lightly touching their forehead with it. Equals shake hands softly and then lightly touch their chests afterwards. Only the right hand should be used to pass and receive things. When calling someone over, it is customary to wave one's fingers downwards, not toward oneself. Similarly, when pointing at something or someone, the index finger should never be used. In Java, people commonly use their thumbs instead.

There's no better way to more directly experience how a culture treats the body than to get an indigenous massage. After a period of long air travel, with all of its attendant tensions (thirty hours from Chicago to Yogyakarta), getting a massage is a good idea regardless, and in Indonesia massages are very inexpensive. There was a spa above

8. See Frank C. Senn, *New Creation: A Liturgical Worldview* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

9. See Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

the room where I was staying in Salatiga, and I used its services several times during my stay. The traditional Javanese massage is offered in a curtained enclosure like a hut and (I am told) is one of the more vigorous of the Asian massages. The powerful strokes of the Javanese massage—which uses all parts of the hand, including the knuckles and sometimes the knees, with the massage therapist on top of the person receiving the massage can be jarring. The purpose is to purge the toxic air (“winds”) from the body that causes congestion and flu-like illnesses. Considering the amount of open-air burning of trash I experienced in Indonesia, I can understand why such a purge would be beneficial. I enjoyed comparing the Javanese massage with other massages I have received, especially other Asian massages. By getting massages in other cultural contexts, one can learn a great deal about one’s own body, in addition to how the body is regarded in another culture.

### **An Ecumenical Approach**

I hope it will be obvious that this book is written from an ecumenical perspective. The students and pastors in my course were predominantly from the Reformed tradition (the Dutch Reformed Church was established in the former Dutch East Indies that became Indonesia). I do not withhold my Lutheran commitments, especially on the sacraments, but my approach reflects the perspective of an author who has studied the whole of the Christian liturgical tradition, both East and West. I believe that in this ecumenical era and age of globalization the entire Christian tradition is available to us. I also know that liturgical ideas in this book will be used selectively, according to denominational beliefs, parish practices, and pastoral need. Readers may select from this feast what seems most delicious to them. It does not hurt to sample some new dishes.

### **Autobiographical Elements**

Autobiographical elements have crept into this book, more so than in

any of my other writings. In “retirement” I suppose one engages in greater reflection on one’s life and career. I also shared aspects of my life experiences with the students in Indonesia as a way for them to get to know their “foreign” teacher better. So stories of my boyhood experiences of rituals at summer camp, my religious experience of the Eucharist as a youth, my bout with cancer, and even a massage experience in Singapore, shared with my class, are left in the book. If nothing else, these autobiographical references let the reader know of my existential investment in this project.

### **Acknowledgments**

I express my gratitude to Satya Wacana Christian University for sponsoring my trip to Indonesia and hosting me with such attention to hospitality. Satya Wacana (Sanskrit for “Truth of the Word”) is a private Christian University founded in 1956 by nine congregations and synods. It is currently owned by eighteen Protestant congregations and synods in Java and throughout Indonesia, mostly in the Reformed tradition.

My thanks to Danny Salim, dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts, for inviting me to Satya Wacana, arranging for my lectures, and personally overseeing the hospitality for my stay in Indonesia; to Yosi Nur Mahardika, the student assistant who made my stay in Salatiga more comfortable by bringing me pharmaceuticals needed to keep my body functioning properly and for seeing to the classroom needs; to the faculty members and students who took me to dinner on many evenings; to Nick and Lela Beem for encouraging me as an amateur to introduce yoga practices in a place where yoga is not yet well established; to Franklin Ishida and the Division for Global Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for providing a travel grant to assist with the airfare, just as they did the previous summer when I taught in Singapore; and to Fortress Press for taking on this project, as well as to Michael Gibson for working with me on the editing.

Namaste!

Frank C. Senn

Evanston, Illinois

Lent 2016



Figure 1. Participants in the Embodied Liturgy course in the Faculty of Performing Arts of Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. Dean Danny Salim is standing to the right of the author. *Satya Wacana* is Sanskrit and means “truth of the word.” This photo was taken on the last Friday after lunch. Unfortunately, several pastors who participated in the course had departed to get back to their congregations.