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Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body (Book Review)

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John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021, xvi + 235 pages. Reviewed by Dr. Alida Sewell, author of *Calvin, the Body, and Sexuality* (Amsterdam, VU University Press, 2012).

John Kleinig, now retired, was a pastor and lecturer at the Australian Lutheran College. He therefore regards himself as a pastoral theologian. Most of the non-Biblical quotes are from Lutheran sources. As someone more familiar with Calvin's writings, I found this approach a refreshing and interesting feature. Luther was certainly more positive about the body than Calvin was. Reformed people are familiar with the phrase, that I "belong, body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ" from the Heidelberg Catechism, but Reformed theology has generally not paid much attention to the implications of that statement. Calvin's negative, or at least ambivalent, views about the body may even have distorted the views of Christians. In the Nicene Creed, we confess that Christ was "incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and was made human," or in another version, "fully human." That fact has received more attention, and on the basis of the Gospel narratives and 1 John 4:2, it could not very well be avoided. But even about Christ's bodily life on earth, not very much has been exegeted. Kleinig has paid careful attention to our human bodies and Christ's body in *Wonderfully Made*.

I was motivated to obtain and review this book after a telephone conversation with an author whose book I had edited. This person asserted that "God despises the flesh." I tried to convince him otherwise, saying that God created our bodies and that without bodies we would not be able to serve God, that Jesus had a human body, and more along those lines. The interstate telephone conversation was not conducive to convincing him. I have since sent him a copy of the book and hope that after reading it carefully, he can come to a different, more positive view.

In the front matter, Kleinig gives prayers and liturgy for life in the body. This section may be used for individual devotion or with a group studying the book together.

In the opening chapter, "BODY MATTERS," Kleinig gives an account of his own relationship

with his body and proceeds in a more general way to introduce the themes that will be discussed in the later chapters. He lists the contentious issues in today's culture relating to the body (5). He shows how obsession with the body and its desired perfection contrasts with contempt for the body and the harm that both views cause:

It is true that many Christians who feel uneasy about their bodies reduce the Christian faith to the pursuit of theological knowledge or the cultivation of their own subjective spirituality. Oddly, the focus on the body as the be-all and end-all of human life can result in the unhealthy embrace of a disembodied kind of spirituality. (6-7)

He discusses the words in Hebrew and Greek for soul, mind, and body and the ways they are used in the translations:

Scripture speaks about embodied minds and mindful bodies. In fact, the Hebrew Old Testament has no terms that correspond exactly to "body" and "mind" in English. The Old Testament speaks more generally about the "flesh" of a person. So does the New Testament. Although sometimes it uses the Greek word for the body in a more technical sense (that is, the human body), the same word is often translated "flesh" to mean not merely the physical body (for example, Gal 2:20) but the sinful self that is opposed to God's Spirit (for example, Rom 8:5-7). (7)

He explains that the Hebrew *nephesh* and the Greek *psychē* refer to any animate creature that has breath, so their *soul* is their life-breath. The animals have that in common with humans.

In discussing Psalm 139, Kleinig compares the limited knowledge we have of ourselves with the complete knowledge that God has of each of us, physically and mentally, personally, and spiritually. God sees each human body from the womb to the tomb. The body matters to God: he created it in his image, he redeems it by Christ's incarnation, and he sanctifies it for life by the Holy Spirit. Because of the

Fall, people serve God badly. We are meant to represent God on earth; no-one does that fully. Only Jesus does it perfectly; he is not just a man made in God's image, but he *is* God's image, the visible likeness of the invisible God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:14).

Therefore, in sharp contrast to those who think that God despises the flesh, Kleinig states the following:

...through God's Son, who took on a human body to reclaim us bodily for fellowship with God the Father, our bodies once again become what they were meant to be. By our faith in Jesus and union with him, our bodies share in his holiness by being filled with the Holy Spirit. They become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). As shrines where God resides, they share in his hidden glory and display it by word and deed to the world. So, through our bodily union with Jesus, we are filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19). We glorify God and honor him with our bodies (1 Cor 6:20). Through him our bodies once again become what they were meant to be, agents of God and instruments by which he shows himself and gives of himself to other people on earth. (15)

Kleinig has written the book "in praise of the triune God who has created the human body to reflect his glory, rescues it from death and destruction, and makes it holy" (18). Kleinig aims to base his *pastoral-theological meditation* about the body on God's word. The book is replete with numerous Bible citations to make this clear. He wants the reader to see the body as God sees it in Christ.

In Chapter 2, "THE CREATED BODY," we read that we were created "male and female" from the very beginning, as Jesus also asserted when he quoted from Genesis (Mark 10:6-8). In part of a lovely quote from *The Estate of Marriage*, Luther wrote, "God divided mankind into two classes, namely, male and female, or a he and a she. ...I cannot make myself a woman, nor can you make yourself a man; we do not have that power." How astonished he would be to learn that people in the twenty-first century try to do just that! He was sure about the impossibility of changing from male to female and vice versa without knowing what we know today: we are male or female down to our very cells, chromosomes, and DNA.

Kleinig outlines the order of the creation commands. God provided and ordered the cosmos to make it ready for human habitation. Whatever was needed for bodily life on earth was created before humanity was created, as also Calvin taught. Only then did God declare his creation to be "very good." Paul confirmed that "everything created by God is good." So too, the human body. God approves of his handiwork.

Kleinig continues in chapter 2 with a discussion of the image of God based on Genesis 1:27 and 5:1b-2. He argues that both biological sex and the corresponding sexual identity are God-given. We were not created with just rational minds and souls; our whole being, including our bodies, is made in the image of God. The task of God's image-bearers was to be "like God by serving as good stewards of the earth and its animals." Each person is created, body and soul, in the womb by God, even after the Fall:

This rules out the common teaching of the soul's pre-existence, either with God in the spiritual realm, as taught in Plato's philosophy and in Mormonism, or its incarnation in a previous being, as taught in Hinduism and in Buddhism. It also rules out any notion of reincarnation in the body of another person, for at death the spirit returns to God its giver (Eccl 12:7). (31)

The creation of Eve as Adam's partner, fit companion, and "body mate" occurs after Adam has been made aware that the animals are not suitable for the kind of companionship that he desires. Adam needed someone who could complement him physically (anatomically), mentally, and spiritually. The creation of Eve filled that need. In the pre-Fall garden, Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed: "Unashamed of their bodies, they are happily at home in them and physically at ease with each other" (35). The shame that followed disobedience necessitated covering up their nakedness with clothing.

In the section "Exiled Body," Kleinig shows how Satan made a "full-frontal attack on the whole person, the body with its appetite for enjoyable food, the mind with its quest for more knowledge, and the soul with its trust in God and his word" (40). He outlines the consequences of Adam and Eve's

disobedience and the ways it affects their whole life. Nevertheless, God still maintains the conditions for a good life on earth, even after the Fall (Acts 14:17). He still upholds all things by the power of his word (Heb 1:3). The blessing of procreation and the mandate to care for the earth still apply. Food and all other good things can still be enjoyed with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:4 and 6:17).

Kleinig next discusses the duty of care for the body and the ways we may work with God in our calling to provide for ourselves as well as for our neighbour and society in general. Extremely relevant to our culture is the notion of identity: “many people now seem to seek their identity in only one aspect of themselves and reject other people who have a different identity or one that seems to negate theirs” (55). Our common identity as human beings is that we are all made in the image of God, whether we acknowledge it or not.

Chapter 3, “THE REDEEMED BODY,” discusses people’s dissatisfaction with the body and the ways we can “learn to love our bodies just as they are” (61), although Kleinig does not criticize cosmetic surgery to correct deformities such as cleft palate. The Fall caused us to be alienated, not only from God and each other but also from our bodies. This alienation has spiritual causes and requires a spiritual solution:

We all need to start from scratch by being born again in a heavenly way (John 3:3,5). And that is what God the Father provides for through his incarnate Son. Jesus redeems the body, transforms the mind, and creates a new self (Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:20-24; Titus 3:4-7). He gives us a clear conscience by forgiving us and offering himself as our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21). We can therefore dress up with him (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). Like a magic cloak that transforms its wearer, he gives us a new self with a new mind and a new body. (62)

This chapter continues at length to draw out the implications of having a body that is redeemed by Christ. Although Kleinig is focussing on the body, he provides a clear picture of the way of salvation available to us in the incarnate Christ. The book is replete with many Scripture references related to both body and salvation. Readers who have not paid much attention to what the Bible teaches about Jesus’ body and the human body will be

amazed. The sections on “body language” and “liturgical body care” refine the concept of the body in the spoken word and the Lord’s Supper.

In the section “Holy Bodies,” Kleinig explains how Jesus, the Holy One of God, became “incarnate in order to share God’s holiness with us He consecrated his human body by his sacrificial death in order to consecrate our human bodies (John 17:19). So now, as our high priest, he prays for our sanctification through him and his proclamation of God’s word (John 17:17); as our human brother who shares our flesh and blood, he sanctifies us (Heb 2:11)” (p. 92). This is where Kleinig goes further than most people when discussing sanctification. They would apply sanctification to our spirit, mind, and behavior, but not the body. Yet, when we read about Christ’s humanity in Hebrews, it is clear that Jesus’ body and our bodies play an important part in our salvation. (See Hebrews 2:5-18 and 4:15.)

Kleinig emphasizes the need for Christians to gather in person (something that was forbidden to many during the pandemic). He compares people who claim to be Christians and who say they are spiritual but not religious, with married people who choose not to live together because “it is too demanding and complicated for them physically. . . . They opt for a virtual marriage, which is, in truth, no marriage” (97). The body of Christ must gather in the body: “We need to participate physically in public worship with our bodies” (98). He then explains,

There are then two sides to a Christian life in the body. On the one hand, there is the receptive life in which God the Father gives us his Holy Spirit and every other spiritual gift to us through Jesus. On the other hand, there is the transmitted life in which we do the holy work that God gives us to do while it is day. Both belong together. Both involve our bodies. Both are the fruit of the incarnation and our faith in God’s incarnate Son. We can only pass on God’s gifts as we receive them bodily. We can only work with God as he energizes us bodily. We can only show God as he is on display in our bodies. (102)

Chapter 4 deals with “THE SPIRITUAL BODY.” For most people,

...physical life in the body ends in physical death, which overshadows the whole of life on earth. But that is not the final outcome of life in the body together with Jesus. Seen from his point of view, the death of a believer is not a period but a semicolon.... Through faith in God's Son, we pass from a lesser life to a greater life, from ever-diminishing life to super-abundant life, from temporal life on earth to eternal life in heaven. (108)

In other words, death is still our last, worst enemy, but the promise of our bodily resurrection comforts us. The process of sanctification culminates in death when we enter eternal life:

We are not destined to become discarnate souls, naked wraiths, disembodied ghosts, when we die. Nothing could be worse than that! Instead, we long to overcome all that now oppresses and distresses us in our bodies by becoming even more fully embodied. That is what God has promised us and prepared for us by the incarnation of his Son!" (113)

When people hear the word "spiritual," they tend to think "non-physical," but our redeemed bodies are not "non-physical"; they are "spiritual bodies" (1 Cor 15:42-44): Our resurrected bodies will be different from those of Jairus' daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus. They were doomed to die again. Our resurrected bodies will be transformed bodies into a new state of being, like Jesus' body after his resurrection, no longer subject to space and time (Phil 3:21). Kleinig expounds on 1 Corinthians 15 to explain how our bodies are transformed (124-131). In a short section on "Funerals," Kleinig shows how our attitude to the deceased and treatment of their bodies should be different from those of the present-day culture.

Chapter 5 is about "THE SEXUAL BODY." It is not easy to discuss sexual matters today. As he writes,

This book is meant to be a rhapsody on the human body—the body created in God's image, redeemed by Christ, and sanctified for eternal life with God. Yet at this point I must, for a moment, change my song from thankful praise to a sad lament. There is, I reckon, no other aspect of life in the body that has been disrupted so

seriously and corrupted so obviously by our fall into sin. There is no other natural, physical gift that has been so evidently misused and commonly abused as this. (148)

The new terminology used to describe modern views about distorted sexual views is "all part of a deliberate or naïve attempt to reconstruct sexuality in contradiction of the traditional understanding, which corresponds in large measure with nature and the teaching of the Bible, since it has been shaped by it" (151). The section on "The Beauty of Chastity" (152-158) provides important wisdom for both singles and couples. The section on the sexual imagination warns about the dangers of pornography and the blessings of Scripture-inspired imagination, as in the Song of Songs. Through sanctification, Christians benefit from their good conscience "because they see their bodies as God sees them and feel as he does about their sexual fidelity. ... Each husband and wife is therefore urged to enjoy life with their spouse ... for that is God's allotted portion for them in their work and in their leisure" (Eccl 9:9), (178).

One would think that "THE SPOUSAL BODY" in Chapter 6 would not add much to "THE SEXUAL BODY" of chapter 5, but the author expands on marriage and its relationship to the marriage of Christ and the church. He also elaborates on the part played by single people in the Christian community, and the difficulty, in this sexualised age, of having strong friendships without sexual involvement. After he exegetes passages on divorce, he concludes, "there are few sins used so effectively by Satan as sexual infidelity that results in the breakup of a marriage. People who have been wounded by the severe fracture of divorce need to be led sensitively and gently to repentance for their part in it, and to faith in the blood of Jesus, who cleanses them from their sins of their former spouse against them" (195-6).

The section on "Gender" deals with the current confusions about sex and gender. The new definition of gender "rejects its connection with the sex of a person and discounts the natural, God-given sexual polarity of male and female. Increasingly, gender has come to describe the kind of mental sexual identity that people choose for themselves

apart from the biological sexuality of their bodies” (196-7). Kleinig gives some pastoral advice on how to encourage children to be comfortable with their developing sexuality. This chapter includes sections on “same-sex marriage” so called, and same-sex intercourse, again with many Scriptural references and explanations.

The final chapter is about “THE LIVING BODY.” It is an enthusiastic summary of what he wrote in the previous chapters. He also gives three perspectives on the body as God sees us in Christ. He concludes the discussion with a personal appreciation of three homes. The first was with his parents and siblings, who are of one flesh with him—through conception and kinship. The second home is with his wife and children, wherever they reside:

I have had one home with her for more than fifty years. She is the fixed, unaltered physical point of orientation for me with my ever-changing body. The temporary marital union of my body with hers in a changing world is a foretaste of our permanent one-flesh union with our Lord Jesus. So I thank God the Father for giving me a second home for my body with her and a preview of my third home through my union with her. (221)

The third home is with Jesus and his Father. He shares it with all the saints: “[I]t is that place where Jesus is at home with us and where we are at home with him” (221).

Some readers may not agree with the specific nuances of Lutheran teaching, such as baptismal regeneration (108). But that should not distract from the overall thesis that we are indeed “Wonderfully Made.”

An author index and subject index are provided as well as a Scripture index. The latter consist of 736 texts, some of which are used multiple times. On checking out some of the references, I did note some mistakes, possibly arising out of the final formatting. Apart from these minor issues, including four typos, the volume is a quality production.

Book Typos

- P. 33 Only after Adam does not find a personal partner for himself (2:20), and only then does the Lord God creates (>> create) the woman for him and present her to him.
- P. 36 Sexual dishonors us more than anything else. (A word missing? ‘abuse’)
- P. 39 and those who are belong to him experience it (cut out ‘are’)
- P. 164 (second to last line), “sanctifies them though it” instead of “through it.”