

W. David O. Taylor. *A Body of Praise: Understanding the Role of Our Physical Body in Worship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 199 pages. \$22.99.

I grew up as a protestant in the 1990's when many of our churches made their first forays into contemporary worship. I remember how free I felt when I attended my first "contemporary" worship night – not so much because of the style of music – but because of the freedom of movement. People were moving their bodies – sitting, standing, kneeling, raising hands, and some even danced. This was an astounding moment for my teenage self who had grown up being told to be still and quiet in church. For the first time, I experienced what it was like to worship, as Vatican II expressed, with "full, conscious, and active participation."³⁹⁰

W. David O. Taylor's timely volume, *A Body of Praise: Understanding the Role of our Physical Bodies in Worship*, comes on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, a season in which most of us realized how we had taken the physicality of the gathered assembly for granted. Zooming a worship service just doesn't invite embodied worship. It suits itself much more to couch potato participation. Stated succinctly by the author, the volume is "about the unique glory of the physical body in corporate worship" (4). Taylor's argument is twofold: first, the human body is not neutral in worship: it brings sensations, joys, burdens, and life experiences into the worship life of the church. Second, Taylor pulls instruction from scripture with three descriptors: we *must* worship God with our bodies (God mandates); we *need* to worship God with our bodies (it is actually good for us); and finally, we *get* to worship God with our bodies (sometimes it's fun, fitting, and helpful).

Taylor fleshes out these two lines of argument through a diversity of lenses, including church history, biblical analysis, a theology of the incarnation, science, art, and ethics—each lens is given a chapter. He defines limitations clearly, acknowledging that an exhaustive look at the body at worship in all denominations or traditions is beyond the capacity of the volume. Taylor also states clearly that he is addressing the gathered assembly in congregational worship and not a broad, "worship-as-a-way-of-life" paradigm. He notes that the work is intended for both lay readers and academics alike, and I suggest that he succeeds at this with a tone that is both theologically articulate and user-friendly.

Taylor could have easily written his volume with the sole use of "Christian" sources (church history, biblical scholarship, and theology), but his use of the arts and sciences make the argument particularly intriguing and more substantive. He asks the reader compelling questions like "how might the psychology of color enable us to inhabit more viscerally the christological story...?" (90); or "how might the visual arts train our bodies to embody the love of Jesus in...a radical way?" (99). Another charism of the book is the sensitive treatment of ethical issues one might encounter concerning the body in worship, addressing disability, invisibility, and the growing impact of our digital world.

While Taylor writes with a hint of preference for his own denominational experiences as an Anglican priest; he also does well in offering a balance that those on both ends of the liturgical spectrum might find challenging or even revelatory. In his pairing of chapters 10 and 11, he walks first through the discipline of liturgical movements in which the entire congregation is invited to participate—like making the sign of the cross, passing of the peace, and more; then turns to the freedom of an individual body in worship—with expressions like dancing, raising hands, and other Spirit-inspired physical expressions.

³⁹⁰ Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1963).

Taylor's final chapter almost feels like a benediction, sealing the value of the body in worship as a valid and necessary means toward Christlikeness. If "in him, we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28), then the discipleship of all our senses is necessary for our sanctification. Taylor writes:

We offer our bodies to God so that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our...broken bodies (2 Cor. 4:10). We offer our bodies to God so that all of it—hand and foot, eye and ear, breath and brain, touch and taste, skin and sinew—might be given over fully to Jesus... (153).

Overall, the volume covers an important topic with great depth and care, all the while noting complexities, limitations, and areas for expansion. *Body of Praise* is an excellent read for pastors, artists, parishioners, and anyone interested in offering their whole selves to God in worship.

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