

## **Incarnational Truth about Humanity’s Sexual Nature (Doing Body-friendly Theology Free from Gnostic Prudery)**

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Can the church be a prophetic voice to the sexual condition of our modern world, when it is historically famous for tiptoeing around the subject of human sexuality? Can what we say doctrinally in this area find a public hearing, when our pretext to sanction such tiptoeing is the *immodesty* of the subject, as defined by our notorious commitment to the ethics of Victorian prudery?

When society was so “Christianized” that it supported these same prudish commitments, we enjoyed a wide audience. Today the popularity of ecclesiastical opinions has descended to the level of political jargon mouthed to win Christian votes. Regardless of that latter trend or the obvious answers to the former questions, we must “face the music” from a higher Source.

### **Theology Sacrificed on the Altar of Prudery**

Our scrupulous loyalty to a prudish view of the body wasn’t just poor theology. It was an unwitting—perhaps sometimes even an idolatrous—cultural investment in heretical error. The kind of *modesty* it proclaimed did not arise from Scripture<sup>1</sup> but from a trust in “*fig leaves*” as a form of morality. An honest and thorough study of the phenomenon of human nakedness biblically, historically, artistically, cross-culturally, and psycho-socially exposes the novelty of this cultural redefinition of *modesty*.<sup>2</sup>

Our committed promotion of this misconception has hindered us from *doing theology* in the *fleshly* dimension of human nature. Retaining our long allegiance to this false concept, or the heresy from which it derives, condemns us to listen to our own echoes in a shrinking ghetto of thought. To catch up to the runaway needs of a world that knows the bankruptcy of Victorianism, we must have bold courage to pursue a major reformation in Christian thinking.

To speak up prophetically, redemptively, and credibly at “*such a time as this,*” we need to recover lost ground. The church’s ancient past once had a *body-friendly theology* that was *free from Gnostic prudery*. We cannot authentically offer today’s society this recovered treasure without digging deep in the mine of a godly, incarnational view of the human body and its sexuality.

In the last half-century the American church has played “catch up” in many areas of reality. Zealous preachers of segregation were silenced by an unflinching human-rights theology. Popular voices labeled environmentalists “left-wing” and “unchristian,” until a closer look at God’s creational mandates showed *ecology* to be a divine priority. Antagonism toward the arts, suspicion about healthcare alternatives, condemnation of new music styles, opposition to women in the pulpit, all diminished as a closer look at Scripture helped us think and act more Christianly in these areas.

Doing theology to promote God’s will “*on earth as it is in heaven*” can topple unjust walls, thwart man-made taboos, and shatter cultural idols. But exploring and expounding a more godly view

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian modesty has no Scriptural support. The “modesty” of Peter and Paul (1Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-4) refers to *dress*ing life up in holy virtues and *avoiding* clothing or other bodily adorning that attracts attention to *self*. This biblical concept of modesty persisted even after Victorian prudery captured Western thought. As late as 1828, *Webster’s Dictionary* said nothing about the use of clothing to hide parts of the body that would create a condition of *modesty*.

<sup>2</sup> For my own studies in this area, see “Rebuilding a Godly View of the Unclad Human Body” on my website: <http://pastordavidrn.com>.

of human sexuality is a hard challenge. To gain listening ears in a world that desperately needs God's truth about sexuality, we must learn to speak in the unfamiliar language of *body acceptance*.

We've been trained by the *body taboo* of church tradition to guard our speech. But no redemptive good news about our sexual nature ever came from the *body shame* language formulated by that taboo. Within evangelical hymnody, homily, and humor there is a subtle array of Gnostic attitudes toward the material world in general and toward the human body in particular.<sup>3</sup>

We often claim biblical ground for trivializing "this world" as "not our home" and for preaching a Greek dualism that neglects the importance of the body and its inherent sexual character. Pulpits are parodied for skimming over sexual issues with evasive wittiness. Expected laughter from the pew confirms the stereotype. Absence of a substantial and thorough evangelical theology of sexuality—or even a sound theology of our physical embodiment—is telltale evidence that this caricature of our uneasiness with *sex* is real. But this comical avoidance, and the attitude it betrays, is no joking matter in our present social climate. It's an inexcusable offense that has surely offended our Creator for a long time.

Immersed in this prudish mindset, past Bible teachers, if not lulled into Gnostic thinking themselves, have showed little concern for a creational view of the material world or for an incarnational view of the human body. The legacy of this doctrinal deficit sets an agenda for remedial theological work, starting with a godly, pure-minded attitude toward the body and its sexual physiology.

Only divine truth about our sexual embodiment can drive out the false spirit of Gnostic prudery and body shame. God-honoring *body-friendliness* alone can derail the church's common flight pattern from the sight of our natural gender distinctions. To retrieve all these "*very good*"<sup>4</sup> parts of human anatomy from prudery's mystifying sexualization, we must break the spell that bound them hostage to pornographic exploitation. Without this positive view of our bodies in the minds of both Christian thinkers and average believers, the church will never doctrinally *catch up* in a practical way to the modern world's need for a Creator-designed self-understanding of our sexual nature as humans.

Archaic appeals to Victorian standards cannot excuse or mend the embarrassing holes in our precepts and preaching about human sexuality. Our hired "pied piper" has taken the pay he demanded. We invested in his mesmerizing tune of Gnostic prudery to spare our children from the rats of pornography. Now, they are lost in both.<sup>5</sup> We could have and should have kept our homes porn-free with the God-ordained, creational truth of body acceptance.

The church isn't bereft of technical knowledge about *sex*, nor do we lack Christian self-help literature about sexual intimacy. But our writings came late, depending too much on trails pioneered and paved by secular *sex-perts*. Curious believers, sitting at the feet of these sex gurus, may end up with a perspective that ignores God's will and wisdom for human sexuality. Yet such worldly experts had merely examined the divine, incarnational territory Christians had been too shy or afraid to enter.

God fashioned the human body from cosmic dust in gender-distinguishable forms,

<sup>3</sup> Gnosticism was a heresy fought by Paul, John, and several early church fathers, especially Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*). See "Gnosticism" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; "Gnosticism" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (Macmillan: New York, 1967), or *Christian History Magazine*, Issue 96 on "The Gnostic Hunger for Secret Knowledge" (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Gen 1:31; Isa 5:20; Tit 1:15

<sup>5</sup> See why prudery leads to pornography in my article, "The Pornographic View of the Body" at <http://mychainsaregone.org/articles/pornographic-view>.

entrusting believers with significantly more to say than secular voices about this “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” “*temple of the Holy Spirit*,”<sup>6</sup> Instead, we kept our *sex* talk in a supposedly *safe* realm of moral ideas and social precepts. We blushed at the sight of and speech about our naked anatomical clay, sculpted so carefully by the Divine Artist during creation.

With the help of a *body-friendly* theology, Christian scholars surely could have done a better job in this special realm of God’s jurisdiction. But we’d tripped on a religiously preserved stumbling block of *Gnostic prudery*. We owed it to our Maker to have been there first, on the front-lines, glorifying God for His fantastic craftsmanship. While we stood aloof, materialistic evolution was awarded credit for our body’s intricate and marvelous sexuality.

Even now, as late-comers, we must strive to be articulate, unembarrassed, and current in this realm of knowledge. But our specific, more imperative duty is to *catch up* theologically. Only proper, realistic thinking about God’s strategic purposes for human gender-distinctive bodies can put the powerful, redemptive words on Christian lips that our sexually confused world needs to hear.

### **The Theological Doorway of Praxis**

Doctrine is “pie in the sky” if it fails “where the rubber meets the road.” When *praxis*<sup>7</sup> is absent in our theology, “down-to-earth” people rightly call us “so heavenly minded” that we’re “no earthly good.” Sexuality and all other aspects of the human condition must be understood and discussed in terms of practical life experience.

In constructing a solidly Christian world-view, our faith must not only inform our lifestyles, but what we meet in life must fit into our faith. Gaining God’s creational perspective guides us in seeing how all of human experience fits into the larger picture of His will and plan. The ideal way to do theology is from principle to practice, from precept to *praxis*.

But if, through cultural blindness or an inculcated mental block, we fail to think correctly about God’s *special*, propositional revelation, He can turn up the volume on His *general*, creational revelation. This is what God has done for multiple millions who have found deliverance from prudish thinking. How? By seeing the body’s sexual distinctions frankly exposed in a nonsexual context.

God meant for us to be awestruck by the sky’s star-studded canopy and by a globe full of magnificent natural wonders. How much more, then, did He intend to stir us to praise by the pinnacle of physical creation—His own Self-portrait in the naked human form? Unclad bodies “*declare the glory of God and show forth his handiwork*”<sup>8</sup> in ways that nothing in the universe can surpass. But hammering out a comprehensive and comprehensible revision of our inherited, prudish world-view to match this bodily revelation is like doing theology in the dark. The darkness isn’t just blindness. We’ve had our eyes shut too tight, and for too long.

Realistic *praxis* clearly presents a rebuttal to the unrealistic assumptions taught by religious prudery. Sometimes forty or fifty years of that false indoctrination personally vanishes in a matter of minutes by the visual rebuke of *the naked truth*. The demanding voice of *praxis* refuses to be ignored. It keeps repeating what it learns about reality, until its lessons finally fit into our world-view.

If our tutored concept of “modesty” was actually true—if the built-in human reaction to

<sup>6</sup> Psa 139:14; 1 Cor 6:19-20

<sup>7</sup> Latin word meaning *action, practice, conduct, application* (of a theory or idea).

<sup>8</sup> Psa 19:1

seeing the opposite sex unclad was truly what prudery's *body taboo* has preached to us<sup>9</sup>—there would be no logical explanation for the experience of health-care workers, of artists working from nude models, or of “naked people groups” and those who visit or work with them.

The common explanations invented for these and other exceptions to the *body taboo* invariably mention the issue of “context.” But when analyzed critically, these boil down to assumptions that offer no rational basis to explain how the context of nudity changes human nature's supposedly inherent response to it. With no authentic logic to validate such exceptions, supporters must rationalize a defense of the *body taboo*. This double-minded approach prevents their moving toward a theology of sexuality that is believable and transferable in our modern world.

One example of this ‘double-standard’ pattern is the church's schizophrenic treatment of women's breasts. Breastfeeding is obviously God-designed. But studies that compare global success with America's breastfeeding-failure rate, partially blame the difference on our culture's obsession with breasts. Prudery laid the groundwork for that obsession by treating the visible breast as a sexual event. For biblical reasons, the church must confess that the rest of the world is wise to treat breastfeeding as a normal sight. Yet in practice, church leaders deem the sight of women's breasts obscene and insist they be hidden when mothers nurse their babies.

If resistance to a global majority's moral perception of breast visibility has no sound defense, a stubborn determination to stay resistant is even less defensible. In fact, we appear puerile, even perverted in trying to protect our prudery from the wholesome way the rest of the world perceives women's breasts. Our predicament is perfectly illustrated by Carolyn Latteier, the author of *Breasts, The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession*:

Well, we do have a peculiar obsession with breasts in this culture. A lot of people think it's just the human nature to be fascinated with breasts but in many cultures, breasts aren't sexual at all. I interviewed a young anthropologist working with women in Mali, a country in Africa where women go around with bare breasts. They're always feeding their babies. And when she told them that in our culture men are fascinated with breasts, there was an instant shock. The women burst out laughing. They laughed so hard, they fell on the floor. They said, “You mean, men act like babies?”<sup>10</sup>

We might join these topless women in laughing at ourselves, if this exposure of our foolishness wasn't so embarrassing. We are right to be ashamed! Our immaturity arises from a perversion. It's clear that God's physiological design of breasts for nursing clashes with society's twisted view of them as obscenities or sex toys. How sad that the church, under the spell of prudery, is so well known for joining society in that latter perception.<sup>11</sup>

Christians can't plant one foot each on the divided platforms of body acceptance and body shame without consequences. The ever-widening tension between such opposite attitudes,

<sup>9</sup> Sermons often blame the visible nudity of Bathsheba's bath for King David's fall into adultery (2 Sam 11:2-4), a supposition not supported in the Bible. Her outdoor bathing was not “shameful” but normal behavior for everyone in Bible times and ancient civilizations. But such preaching *is* shameful, because it challenges the authority of God's Word with man-made cultural taboos. It says God condemned her nudity, while Scripture treats it as ordinary or irrelevant.

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Latteier, from an interview on Berman & Berman's television program, “All about Breasts,” aired June 4, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> An excellent online environment to help Christians reform their “immodest” perceptions and treatment of the breast is “007-Breasts,” a woman-friendly website on *breastfeeding*, *breast acceptance*, *breast health* and *breast emancipation* (<http://007b.com>). Its argues powerfully to free the breast from its sexualization and exploitation in American culture.

typified by this breast-visibility confusion, will rip an embarrassing split in their theological pants. Affirming the indecency of breasts exposed for non-sexual purposes is a tacit denial of their true nature as beautiful organs of nurture expressly designed by God to adorn and identify the female gender of our race.

Theology must inform *praxis*. But when sound theology is skewed by letting culturally adopted concepts overshadow biblical truth, misguided *praxis* can sometimes expose the error. The Bible teacher Dr. James McKeever illustrated this in his reprimand to the Western church on its cultural perceptions of the nude body:

There is a tribe, which lives on the island of West Kalimantan (formerly Dutch Borneo), who go nude because of the extreme heat. They go to church this way, and there are actually pictures of them taking communion (the Lord's supper) with the entire church nude.

To most Christians in America a nude communion scene would seem terrible. However, to Christians in other parts of the world, it would seem very normal and natural. It is a very difficult task to sort out in our minds what has come from our culture, our environment and our upbringing, and what is truly part of God's character. The thing that we need to be very careful of is not to create God in our own cultural image. We need to guard against attributing characteristics to Him based on the taboos of our society. The very worst thing is to take a false image of God that we have created and to try to impose our "god" on other cultures.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. McKeever's words are too polite. The bottom line is this: if we Christians preach our culturally formed ideas of body shame as part of the Gospel, we are practicing a form of *cultural idolatry*.

Fortunately, our guilt in this error has been acknowledged by modern mission agencies. They try to prevent this former mistake of mixing prudery into the message of Christ. They train new missionaries to avoid making dress a moral issue in evangelizing these naked cultures.<sup>13</sup> However, this cross-culturally sound policy is not matched by the church's willingness to confess its past errors in foreign lands, or to dispense with its ongoing enchantment with this same prudery at home. Such hypocrisy is easily recognized by the secular academic community and uneasily defended, when used as an argument against historical Christian behavior.

Since prudery has no doctrinal place in true Christian faith, we should never attempt to defend our past or present involvement with it. Instead, we should eradicate it by discovering where the error of prudery originated and how Gnostic ideas about our bodies and the material world found sanction in the church.

Actually, Victorian perceptions are relatively recent. Going back farther, we can learn much by investigating the attitudes behind some of the harsher forms of asceticism practiced by

<sup>12</sup> From "Nudity and Lust" from Dr. James McKeever's book, *It's in the Bible* (Medford, Oregon: Omega Pub., 1988), p. 79. A copy of this chapter, which corroborates much of my own study, is available on my website (see note #2).

<sup>13</sup> A film scene in *The Emerald Forest* (Boorman, 1985) contrasts the normality of exposed breasts with the obscenity of the "civilized" underwear kidnapped native girls were made to wear when sold into prostitution. After their rescue, they quickly tore off and cast those bras to the ground as disgustingly vile.

Western obsession with "fig leaves" didn't bring holiness to such people: "The missionaries had believed they were aiding the cause of morality when they insisted converts wear clothes, 'only to discover,' according to Smith, 'that the clothes the girls put on became a source of allurements to men who all their lives had taken nudity for granted!'" [Ruth A. Tucker in *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 206.]

*Body shame* brought our culture's porn problems to "naked peoples." The "Willowbank Report" (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization) wisely designated cultural habits of dress as "matters indifferent" to the Gospel. When today's missionaries to naked cultures discover firsthand just how "indifferent" the matter of dress or undress is to the Gospel, many adopt the same attitude toward nonsexual social nudity that I learned as an RN.

monastic hermits and often popularized by the church's early bishops. In such historical observations we may find the unprotected doorways that allowed the infiltration of Gnostic ideas about human embodiment. But the original entry point of this heretical error seems to be in humanity's primeval story.

## **Gnostic Attack on Incarnational Human Nature**

The Christian church is founded on the richest doctrinal territory in the universe. Next to the doctrine of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead, the doctrines of Christ's physical Incarnation and of His bodily Resurrection are the most precious treasures in our faith. Yet we have barely scratched the surface of what these twin doctrines imply about the nature of redeemed humanity's present earthly calling and our future destiny.

Nothing explains our own incarnate nature better than Christ's. His Incarnation, when fully understood, explains the reason for God's creation of humanity in the first place. But after the Fall, God's promise of bodily restoration, in direct conjunction with Christ's own incarnate resurrection, has become the specific "hope" in which every believer is "saved." It is also the eagerly anticipated "hope" of the entire spiritual and physical creation.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of our physical bodies lies in the fact that we, of all other creatures in the universe, were especially created in God's image as *body-spirit* beings. We are such an intimate interweaving of *spirit* and *matter* that we are not wholly *human* apart from that amalgamation. Death's separation of our spiritual and corporeal natures is only temporary, even for the lost.<sup>15</sup>

This incarnational understanding resounds from the New Testament. The early church fought to preserve it, as orthodox Christians struggled to stop Gnostic attitudes about the material world and the human body from corrupting the faith. Revisiting this doctrinal battleground is an enlightening path of discovery.

When Paul fought Gnosticism, he used its own terminology (i.e., "knowledge", "fullness," "mystery") to show the Gospel's superiority over Gnostic attitudes that had become prevalent and were already endangering Christian thinking. Later, the church set down formal responses to this and other heresies. The phrase in the *Apostle's Creed* stating that God is "Maker of heaven and earth" was meant to keep Gnostics out of the church. Part of the ancient nude baptismal ritual<sup>16</sup> was for converts to confess their belief that human salvation culminates in "the

<sup>14</sup> Rom 8:23-24a

<sup>15</sup> Mat 5:29-30; 10:28; Rev 20:4-6, 11-14

<sup>16</sup> The (Google-able) *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, Chapter 21:1-20 (c. 215) prescribes in detail the standard ritual of nude baptism, requiring a Trinitarian formula of confession like that in the *Apostle's Creed* during a three-fold outdoor immersion in flowing water. Both genders disrobed by precept. Their nudity bore symbolic testimony to an array of doctrinal meanings, some of which were described by Cyril of Jerusalem (313-385 AD): "As soon, then, as ye entered, ye put off your tunic; and this was an image of putting off the old man with his deeds. Having stripped yourselves, ye were naked; in this also imitating Christ, who was stripped naked on the Cross, and by His nakedness put off from Himself the principalities and powers, and openly triumphed over them on the tree. For since the adverse powers made their lair in your members, ye may no longer wear that old garment; I do not at all mean this visible one, but the old man, which waxeth corrupt in the lusts of deceit. May the soul which has once put him off, never again put him on, but say with the Spouse of Christ in the Song of Songs, I have put off my garment, how shall I put it on? O wondrous thing! ye were naked in the sight of all, and were not ashamed; for truly ye bore the likeness of the first-formed Adam, who was naked in the garden, and was not ashamed." [*The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem*, Lecture XX, (On the Mysteries. II.), "Of Baptism", 2, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans)].

resurrection of the flesh.”

Satan lurks behind all deceits in heresy. It takes very little contemplation to see that he was the culprit who introduced Gnostic deception in the Garden of Eden. This is evident in the first recorded result of the first human sin: a false self-concept, foreign to the *body-spirit* nature of our humanity.

In various “mystery cults” current in New Testament times, Gnostic gurus promised access to spiritual insight and deliverance from this “defiled” material world, and from our burdensome flesh, through possessing the “secret knowledge” hidden in the inner circles of their fellowship. In a similar and seminal way, the voice of the Satan-possessed serpent promised “*opened*” eyes and spiritual wisdom to our first parents through the divinely withheld “*knowledge*” (*gnosis*) in the forbidden fruit. Satan knew something they didn’t. Taking into themselves that forbidden *gnosis* would introduce them to his own demonic style of deification.

Fruit from Eden’s “*tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” was lethal. Ingesting it rendered humans spiritually separate and morally independent from their Maker, just as Satan had become. Satan lured Adam and Eve to swallow that *gnosis* in order to destroy their union with God and distract them from feeding on the Word by which they were meant to “*live*”—the truth coming personally “*from the mouth of God.*”<sup>17</sup> Feeding on forbidden fruit set the stage for millions of different moralities in which humans independently decide what is *wrong* or “*right in their own eyes.*”

Satan evidently had a corollary motivation. Into this newly independent human thinking, he could sow the seed of Gnostic division between *spirit* and *flesh*. The forbidden *gnosis* had “*opened*” Adam and Eve’s eyes to see things on their own, outside the safety of their Maker’s revelation. By shrewdly suggesting an unnatural, Gnostic separation in human self-understanding, Satan probably thought he could thwart the plan for which God had made humanity as a union between the spiritual and the physical worlds.

Three relationships simultaneously fell apart when Adam and Eve ignored God’s direct, personal guidance by imbibing that fruit: separation from God, discord with each other, and estrangement from their own bodies. Evangelical teaching on the restorative dimensions of Christ’s redemption focus almost exclusively on those first two categories. We basically ignore the third. But of the three, Adam and Eve’s *bodily alienation* was recorded as the first and immediate result of their *gnosis*-based independence in morally determining what was “*good and evil.*”

In terms of primeval human history, this initial episode of *body shame* wasn’t an intrinsically human reaction to seeing with “*opened*” eyes. The Bible offers evidence that it was an informed response, influenced by the very devil who helped get their eyes “*open.*” How so? God’s second question to Adam in Genesis 3:11 (“*Who told you that you were naked?*”) plainly infers it. They had been “*told*” and were functioning under a brand new definition for the natural state in which God had created them.<sup>18</sup> Judging from their immediate response to this *new* description, their liberated morality concluded that “*naked*” bodies were “*evil*” and that hiding them was “*good.*” This foreign, *human-unfriendly* attitude, is so typical of spiritual rebellion. It completely reversed God’s own evaluation in Genesis 1:31 that “*everything that He had made . . . was very good.*” His “*good*” description extended to bare bodies.

<sup>17</sup> Deut 8:3

<sup>18</sup> *Nakedness*, as a concept, is meaningless in a world where nothing was ever covered—so as to become *naked* by being uncovered. The first *hidden* bodies in creation became so by being covered with fig-leaves. In a world where God had made no created thing artificially covered, His question highlighted the novelty of the term “*naked.*” The earlier use of “*naked*” (Gen 2:25) is based on the fact that all ‘post-Fall’ readers have learned that *naked* means *uncovered*.

When Satan infiltrated this paradise gallery of divine artwork, it wasn't just to paint fig-leaf graffiti over God's opening exhibit of nude Self-portraits. He had strong political reasons for getting us to trade an incarnational *body acceptance* for Gnostic dualism's alienating self-understanding. Humans—created in God's image—were a special union between the two worlds of creation: cosmic and angelic. We visibly displayed within creation the transcendent Creator's "likeness." We *imaged* His immanent presence. As His representatives, we were to unite and bring "heaven and earth" under a single divinely-led human government.<sup>19</sup> Participating in the realms of matter and spirit, we were mediators of both. Bearing the "image" of the Creator, we were His ambassadors to both.

The rebellious fallen angel Lucifer must have cringed at this divine plan. These new *spirit beings*, nakedly embodied in *animal flesh*, would finally mature to a point where they would "judge angels,"<sup>20</sup> himself included. If their *incarnate* nature was the key in God's plan, what better tactic for rupturing their spiritual tie to the Planner than by seducing them to become morally independent, as he had become when he fell? And what better way to sabotage their destined cosmic dominion than by breaking their natural physical tie to the rest of naked creation with *body shame*?

This scenario isn't just conjecture from reading-between-the-lines in Genesis. This story's climax is the strategy of the Gospel, as described in the first chapter of Colossians.<sup>21</sup> God's Son, the new humanity's "firstborn over all creation," has "by the death of his physical body" not only "reconciled" human sinners but "all things to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven"—everything that human sin alienated. By resurrection, this second Adam became "the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself might have first place in everything." Although already supreme over "all things in heaven and on earth . . . visible and invisible" as their Creator (v.16), Jesus now holds this supremacy as a truly human King and Leader of a renewed human race.

This *human* role in creational supremacy is part of the *old news* reclaimed by the *Good News*. It was explained briefly in the Genesis account of creation, which described our unique existence as God's image-bearers. Now, by His Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection, our God and Savior has personally retrieved and will finally reinstate this lost destiny for redeemed humanity.<sup>22</sup>

This "hope of the gospel," in some unknown way, "has been proclaimed to every creature [lit., 'all the creation'] under heaven" (v.23). Creation's mysterious awareness of the Gospel, outlined in Colossians, is confirmed in Romans. The eighth chapter<sup>23</sup> describes creation "eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's children." When human sin derailed His plan to bring cosmic and celestial creation under human rule, God provisionally made these created realms "subject to futility" until His own incarnational work could reconcile all things. Meanwhile, "all creation has been groaning with the pains of childbirth up to the present time" waiting to "be set free from corrupting bondage in order to share the glorious freedom of God's children."

<sup>19</sup> This divine goal will be fulfilled by a Human King, the God-Man Jesus Christ, as revealed in these related passages: Col 1:15-23, Rom 8:19-24a, and Phil 2:5-11.

<sup>20</sup> Satan may have guessed this from God's plan for humans to "have dominion over" (Gen 1:26, 28), but we know this directly from 1 Cor 6:3.

<sup>21</sup> Col 1:15-23 (ISV)

<sup>22</sup> This cosmic and angelic dimension in Christ's physical death is not new but unfamiliar Scriptural territory for those whose theological focus is on human redemption as an end in itself. The Colossians passage (1:15-23) throws light on humanity's pivotal role in creation, but the big picture is not "all about us." It's about how our *body-spirit* nature and creational mission as servant-leaders were taken on by God's Son through the Incarnation.

<sup>23</sup> Rom8:19-24a (ISV)



One aspect of that human “*freedom*” remains to be completed. What both the earthly and angelic<sup>24</sup> realms “*eagerly*” await is “*our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*” Physical resurrection will finally restore God’s original plan for the human race. In immortal physical bodies, like Christ’s glorified body, His corporate Bride, the Church, will forever reign with her supreme Human Bridegroom, the “*King of kings and Lord of lords,*” ruling over creation’s anxiously awaited “*new heaven and new earth.*”

Failing to see humanity through the lens of God’s ultimate plan can make our presentation of the Gospel more self-centered than authentically *human-friendly*. Evangelistic appeals become narrow and nearsighted when selfishly motivated. While *reaching heaven* and *missing hell* are worthy goals, they are basically individualistic. Potential converts need to know what it means to be created in God’s image, why the Gospel proclaims bodily resurrection,<sup>25</sup> and how the invitation to divine union with God’s incarnate Son offers every believer an exciting destiny of eternally rewarding servanthood far beyond description or imagination.

Redeemed humanity’s future isn’t to be a static residence in heavenly bliss, but a partnership with Christ in the ministry of jurisdiction over the whole universe. Gnostic disinterest in the material world and detachment from our dusty bodies have distracted us from this divine calling.

In the 1971 movie, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, people were seeking a “golden ticket” in order to get through the gate of Wonka’s factory and enjoy a tour of sweets. But the candy-maker had another goal. He wanted to find someone whom he could put in charge of his whole estate. At the end of the movie, Charlie discovered that his excitement in finding a golden ticket was just the beginning. I tried to capture this illustration in a poem:

**DOMINION**  
**(an allegory)<sup>26</sup>**

Willy Wonka scattered tickets;  
Set a golden Date.  
People prayed and sought with hope of  
Getting through the Gate!

Briefly sweet, delicious Heaven’s  
Thrill soon waned. . . . Alas!  
Even Charlie, sad, disheartened,  
Felt its pleasure pass.

But Almighty Master Wonka,  
Candyman-Who-can,  
To the faithful, saintly Charlie,  
Prophesied His plan:

“Sharing My delights in Heaven?  
That was not my Goal!

<sup>24</sup> We’re not told the story of angels, but we know they’re interested in *ours* (1 Peter 1:12) and rejoice over human conversions (Luke 15:10).

<sup>25</sup> Evangelism should emphasize the hope of bodily resurrection (Acts 4:2, 33; 17:18, 32; 23:6; 24:15). My poem “I Sing the Body Immortal” (Google-able, or in *Poems Between Birth and Resurrection*) augments with the Gospel message of resurrection Whitman’s limited praise of the body in “I Sing the Body Electric.”

<sup>26</sup> from *Poems Between Here and Beyond* © 2016 by David L. Hatton.

My creation needed you to  
Rule in full control.”

Human Charlie willy-nilly  
Grabbed some chocolate bars,  
Gripped the hand of Candy Maker,  
Shot beyond the stars!

— 4/11/2016

A message that presents Jesus as our “ticket” to pass through the “pearly gates” into celestial bliss is not the real Gospel. God isn’t inviting us to join Him in Heaven for an eternal *good time*. He wants us to join Him in running *it* and everything else. Our soul’s flight to Heaven is just a stop-over until Resurrection Day, when God will finally establish us in our proper role of stewardship over a renewed physical and spiritual creation. This time, however, we won’t fail in our governing assignment. The redeemed and restored human race will have the Creator of the universe Himself as our supreme Human Leader in the task!

### **Divine Illustrations and the Trinitarian Image**

Understanding God’s ultimate plan for humanity, as outlined above, offers a unique way to question and determine the validity of beliefs, whether from non-Christian world-views or from minor points taught denominationally: “Is that concept *human-friendly*?” Legitimate, user-friendly concepts about human nature and our ultimate destiny will find their roots in the Creator’s original design and in Christ’s incarnational restoration of it. They will be both creation-friendly and human-friendly.

When Gnostic prudery’s enchanting spell is broken, a mental veil is lifted. Legalistic blindness from satanically “*opened*” eyes is healed by a restored human-friendly way of viewing our incarnate nature. We may be shocked to realize how far body shame drew us away from a true understanding of ourselves. We begin to see that body acceptance isn’t just a human-friendly perspective on our embodiment, but a Creator-honoring attitude—a God-friendly view of body that pays homage to His handiwork.

This awareness is confirmed by a variety of resources and evidences. One is a careful and thoughtful review of Scripture itself, that is, after we’ve removed our culture-tinted spectacles of prudery.<sup>27</sup> Unlike us, those living in biblical times had much more exposure to common routines that made occasional nudity a normal part of life. Also, a human-friendly rereading of the Bible can show us how God uses our sexuality to symbolize His divine plan for human salvation or how our bodies visually reflect certain divine attributes or convey divine messages about Himself.

### **The Sign of Circumcision**

A stark example of this symbolism is God’s use of penile circumcision to signify—in a very noticeable way—His Old Covenant with Israel. God promised to bless all the world through Abraham’s offspring, known now to be Christ. By placing this intimate physical sign on that

<sup>27</sup> My novelette *Meeting at the River* is an autobiographical fantasy used as a vehicle to set down my gleanings from just such a reviewing of Scripture.

special part of the male body, God was reminding the Jews that His promise to Abraham was especially focused on His original mandate to humanity: “*be fruitful and multiply.*” Physiologically, the connection is obvious.

A missing foreskin makes the naked penis even more naked. Circumcision creates a permanent uncovering of the *glans penis*, usually only visible during penile erection. Its perpetual exposure, with the foreskin removed by this surgical ‘sign,’ symbolically displayed its functional state preceding sexual union. This, in turn, was an authentic reminder to Jewish people of the way in which the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled: *procreation*.

In Bible times, this was a truly legitimate *sign*—a socially visible identifier of the Covenant—because it was commonly seen. Male genitals were exposed routinely for the public activities of bathing, urination, and sometimes even outdoor and indoor manual labor.<sup>28</sup> Its frequent, normal visibility confirmed circumcision’s purpose as a valid sign. But its public exposure had no obscene connotation, as it does today. If ancient culture had been like ours, where hiding the genitals is considered a moral necessity, God couldn’t have realistically made circumcision a visible reminder of His promise. Modern cultural prudery even blinds us from even contemplating that the common sight and sexual explicitness of this sign was the very reason God expressly chose it.

### A Good Look at Women’s Breasts

Another divine teaching from the human body is how the placement and purpose of women’s breasts contribute to symbolize God’s very own nurturing nature.<sup>29</sup> In my opinion, nothing is more beautiful than a naked newborn feeding *skin-to-skin* against a mother’s naked bosom, enfolded close to her heart by loving arms.<sup>30</sup> God uses this manner of maternal-child bonding in Isaiah 66:11-13 to paint a portrait of His nurturing care for us.<sup>31</sup>

By joining society’s treatment of breasts as sexual obscenities, the church keeps this God-given visual illustration invisible, thus nullifying it. One major practice is the *human-unfriendly* custom of sending nursing moms to “cry rooms.” Keeping open breastfeeding away from the eyes of the congregation confirms the ‘indecent’ of breasts. It also keeps young believers from growing up seeing them as normal parts of female bodies or from being clear on the real reason God created them

The divine cure for our culture’s insane obsession with breasts isn’t to hide them, but to let a frank, normal view of them exorcize the demonic prudery that surrendered them into the hand of porn-brokers. Women’s breasts are God’s territory, and He chose their function as a visible illustration of His character. He beautifully fashioned them as organs to identify gender and to nourish new human life. He never designed them to be the avenues of sexual enticement

<sup>28</sup> In Bible times, the shame felt from nakedness is always related to contexts of coercion, military defeat, poverty (physical and spiritual), or sexual violations and disrespect. It is never associated with the body’s normal exposure *in work* (Exo 22:26-27; John 21:7 [lit.]), *in a prophetic role* (Isa 20:2-4; Mic 1:8; 1 Saml 19:23-24), or *in outdoor bathing* (Exo 2:5-7; 2 Sam 12:1-9), all of which exposed a person’s naked body to friends, family, and neighbors.

<sup>29</sup> See “Teaching God’s Design for BREASTS-A Crucial Message About the ‘Visible Breast’ for Christian Leaders” in Appendix B of *Meeting at the River* or linked to from my “Rebuilding...” webpage (see note#2).

<sup>30</sup> Modern hospitals educate moms to practice *skin-to-skin* breast-feeding and cuddling, described in the literature as “naked baby against mom’s bare chest.”

<sup>31</sup> *The Message* paraphrases it this way: “*You newborns can satisfy yourselves at her nurturing breasts. Yes, delight yourselves and drink your fill at her ample bosom.*” *GOD’s Message*: “*I’ll pour robust well-being into her like a river, the glory of nations like a river in flood. You’ll nurse at her breasts, nestle in her bosom, and be bounced on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I’ll comfort you. You will be comforted in Jerusalem.*”

that Western society made of them by keeping the perpetually hidden.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Social Nakedness of Triune Deity**

Another concept about the body's intended portrayal of divine truth is that God apparently wanted to have a world full of naked people. This is implied by His command, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*"<sup>33</sup> It's clear in Scripture that God created humans in naked "*male and female*" bodies to reflect or represent His Triune Godhead: "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*"<sup>34</sup>

Our first parents were created nude, the way we still come into and leave this life. As a Triune Society mutually dwelling in light, the Members of the Godhead live in entire and eternal openness to One Another. Theirs is a perfect social nakedness far beyond mortal imagination. Humanity was to *image* the Trinity bodily as a social Self-portrait ("*Let us . . . in our image*"). By virtue of their nudity, a naked human population on this planet would have symbolically represented the social openness within the Trinity.

Those mortified by this idea shouldn't allow preconceptions to skew their vision. This command for a naked couple to reproduce themselves fits perfectly within God's original intention for us as image-bearers to portray His "likeness." Only a human society living openly united in the light of naked truth could worthily rule creation as ambassadorial representatives of the nakedly open Society of Three. A religious commitment to social *fig leaves* has effectively canceled that symbolic manner of *imaging* Deity and has blocked most of us from even being able to mediate on it.

### **Human Sexuality's Theological Significance**

After Karol Wojtyla became John Paul II, he gave to Roman Catholics, and to the world, a long series of papal addresses that became the first comprehensive theological expression of *body acceptance* in the history of the church. Christopher West, as a young catechist, began spreading the content of those addresses across America and abroad. He has helped popularize the crucial message about humanity's sexual nature in what is now called John Paul II's "*Theology of the Body*" (TOB). West has even been welcomed in Protestant settings.<sup>35</sup> The content and insights in the TOB make it a landmark contribution and sorely needed corrective to the modern church. No other theological work to date even approaches its thoroughness in dealing with God's purpose for the physical human body and its sexual nature.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Catholic artist-priest Thomas J. Loya promoted letting mothers nurse openly in church as a preventative against the pornographic abuse of breasts. His talk, called "At Her Breast" aired July 21, 2008, can be listened to or download at: [http://catholicradiointernational.com/abodyoftruth/mp3/abot\\_072108.mp3](http://catholicradiointernational.com/abodyoftruth/mp3/abot_072108.mp3).

<sup>33</sup> Gen 1:28 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> Gen 1:26-27 (KJV)

<sup>35</sup> A large church in my denomination, Skyline Wesleyan in the San Diego area, invited Christopher West to speak in February of 2010. His talk can be heard or downloaded from: [www.pastordavidrn.com/files/CWestAtSkyline.mp3](http://www.pastordavidrn.com/files/CWestAtSkyline.mp3).

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II's papal addresses were collected, edited and compiled under his supervision into a book called *Man and Woman He Created Them – A Theology of the Body*. On his website ([www.christopherwest.com](http://www.christopherwest.com)), Christopher West has more information about the TOB. My website has a talk that West presented to a Protestant group (<http://pastordavidrn.com/files/IntroTOB-CW.mp3>). His Catholic series of talks, entitled "Naked Without Shame," are free to download as MP3 files from: [www.giftfoundation.org/products\\_naked.cfm](http://www.giftfoundation.org/products_naked.cfm).

The TOB clearly exposes the heretical roots of *prudery* by directly confronting Gnosticism as historically manifested in the heresy of Manichaeism. Among the many insights that Christopher West shares from the TOB, three especially stand out to me:

- The loving, *one-flesh* sexual union of marriage was meant to be a bodily “image” of the loving mystery of unity within the Trinity, and as that Trinity of Love produces creation and life, so the “*likeness*” of the Godhead in wedded sexual love was meant to procreate human life.
- The spousal relationship is a bodily *sign* or *sacrament* with the female’s receptivity toward the male’s physical love, symbolizing our relationship to God in salvation. Starting in Genesis, this metaphor runs through Scripture to Revelation, where we see the Lamb of God marrying us, His Bride, the Church.
- *Eros* and *agape*, both part of Love’s divine nature, form a mutually necessary interrelationship that God intends to be physically and spiritually fulfilled in conjugal human love.

Although it sometimes alludes to concepts peculiar to Roman Catholicism, the TOB deserves serious Protestant attention. Karol Wojtyla, who composed this work prior to his papal election, set a precedent for theological soundness in this area. His TOB exemplifies the relevant, God-honoring, mundane answers needed by a sexually crippled society that is missing God’s essential *agape* in its disordered grasp for His “*very good*” *eros*.

### Where a “Major Paradigm Shift” Could Take Us

When one minister heard me sharing the views expressed in this paper, he exclaimed, “This is nothing less than a major paradigm shift in thinking.” Christopher West uses similar words to describe Christ’s “spousal love” in dying for us on the cross:

Contemplating the ‘naked Christ’ and his body ‘given up for us’ compels a radical paradigm shift both in the way we view God (theology) and in the way we view ourselves (anthropology), especially with regard to our own sexual embodiment.<sup>37</sup>

My minister friend went on to say exactly what I was thinking . . . that some well-known, respected evangelical leader needs to hear this, get convinced, and start spreading this liberating “good news” (which is also what Mr. West calls it). Roman Catholics have no one commanding more respect and attention than the late Pope John Paul II. His energetic spokesman, Christopher West, is already familiar and well-received among them. But who will stand up in the evangelical world and broadcast this *biblical paradigm* about our sexual bodies?

Mine is a small voice, and even though I’ve tried to shout this message of body acceptance loudly, I’ve made only a small noise. The need is for many voices, larger, louder voices, those of whole Christian denominations and parachurch organizations.

As I close this long essay, I’ll finish by taking a risk. I’m going to do some realistic envisioning of what might follow, if we got serious about *doing theology* in this area of body

<sup>37</sup> Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2007), p. 48.

acceptance. What would a “major paradigm shift” look like, if adopted and voiced by a large number of evangelical leaders and churches? What might result from trading our heritage of Gnostic prudery for a renewed, incarnational view of the human body and its sexuality?

As a Wesleyan minister, I support my own denomination’s commitment to “one mission—the spreading of scriptural holiness throughout every land.”<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, I must confess that my “Holiness” tradition hasn’t always spread a “holiness” free from Gnostic perceptions of the gendered human body. Yet an embodied holiness is exactly the spirituality God intended.<sup>39</sup> Holy living has more in common with fulfilling God’s down-to-earth “do”-mandates in Genesis 1-2 than with obeying a scrupulously man-made “don’t”-list. The latter behavior has been too often mistaken for true holiness.

Incarnational *holiness* is human *wholeness*, first through Christ’s healing salvation, then through the Holy Spirit’s *wholistic* sanctification of “body, soul and spirit” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Holiness must be in sync with our *body-spirit* nature. What first attracted me to John Wesley was his spiritual emphasis on social action. His *holiness* included promoting education, bodily health, and social equity in rights and roles despite gender or skin color.

What might happen if we genuinely and radically adopted a creational view of holiness firmly tied to our physical and sexual embodiment in the material world?

- A church atmosphere with a godly, holy attitude of *body acceptance* might lead some to find as authentic a spiritual calling in health-care vocations, like nursing, chiropractic, or massage therapy, as others find in ministerial callings.
- Presenting our youth with a godly, non-prudish frankness about our human sexual embodiment might be an *ounce of preventing* trouble worth *a pound of curing* it afterward.
- A heightened desire to bring sexual wholeness to those wounded through promiscuity, sexual abuse and gender confusion, might spawn new teams equipped with divine truth and prayerful compassion to minister to those needs.
- Forsaking prudery might allow some churches to decorate ceilings with Sistine-Chapel-like scenes, encouraging holy thoughts about the body’s natural state and praise for the Creator’s glory manifested in male and female anatomy.

A mindset committed to a prudish view of the body might slander this list as inappropriate or even dangerous. But our wayward world desperately needs to see an authentic demonstration of the incarnational holiness that these possibilities suggest.

### The Christian Figurative Artist

Replacing Gnostic prudery with godly *body acceptance* would signal an invitation that might draw many more artists to the church. Art instructors tell students that, to become great

<sup>38</sup> *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*, Ch. 2, 100.

<sup>39</sup> “Jesus took on the form and body of a human being. This event makes the human body. . . a chosen instrument of salvation. God sees it as a worthy vehicle for the completion of divine purposes. We may not, then dismiss or denigrate our bodies. . . we must think of our bodies and spirits as an integrated being, and we must care for the whole self. How we treat our physical selves . . . has spiritual implications.” [from “Meeting God in the Created Order” in *The Spiritual Formation Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), p. 829.

artists, they must learn to draw the naked human form. Skeptical Christian artists often get converted to that same opinion in *life drawing* classes.<sup>40</sup> But the church has a history of resisting what artists learn in that environment and a consistent habit of censoring the artwork produced from what's seen there. In commenting on the censorship fostered by this kind of resistance, Madeleine l'Engle wrote,

I would not hide the human body . . . , as though it was something to be ashamed of—though neither would I flaunt it. Let it be natural and holy. The incarnation was a total affirmation of the dignity of this body, and Paul goes on to emphasize that we are, moreover, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and if we abuse or reject or ignore our bodies we are abusing and rejecting and ignoring this temple.

I was both amused and appalled in a rotunda in the Prado, filled with Greek and Roman statues, to see that all the genitals had been removed, and covered with some kind of leaf. This prudery is in itself a form of pornography.<sup>41</sup>

Thinkers like l'Engle, recognizing this hypocrisy, can still stay loyal to the church. Artists without such loyalty may reject the church for this prudery. Each time they draw, paint or sculpt from a nude model, it affirms in their minds the goodness of the human body. But each session also confirms their criticism of the church: “They lied to us about the human body . . . how perverted to call its beauty ‘obscene’ . . . they must have dirty minds.” Carefully weigh the words of Robert Henri, an art instructor of the past, who wrote,

There is nothing in all the world more beautiful or significant of the laws of the universe than the nude human body. . . . among all people . . . a greater appreciation and respect for the human body should develop. When we respect the nude we will no longer have any shame about it.<sup>42</sup>

This secular artist's healthier attitude about human nudity is not foreign to Christianity. To stimulate praise and holy thought, older European churches set the unclad body directly before believers' eyes in the context of congregational worship. Is the modern church so bound in prudery that we can't retrieve this key for breaking the spell of *body shame*?

Envision a fund-raising art exhibition in a church parking lot where lovely compositions using nudity are being sold right beside beautiful landscapes. Imagine that the assistant pastor is one of the artists who painted the nudes. Would it be strange for that church to offer an empty classroom during the week to those holding an occasional all-day course for training artist ‘life models’? If one of their Sunday school teachers, who's been out-of-work for awhile, enrolled in that course, would it bother such a congregation?

These radical possibilities would be “no big deal” in a church where a godly, wholesome attitude toward the body has reformed the minds of its membership. But it's a dream never to come true where “vain imaginations” about nudity and a *sexualized* view of human anatomy are still being preached with the same devotional fervor as Christ's Gospel.

<sup>40</sup> I personally know two Christians who teach college *life drawing* classes. The artist Fiona Gruber wrote, “In an age where everything, from the sale of shoes to the drinking of coffee, is sexualized, it's refreshingly innocent to spend a couple of hours painting a naked body without a hint of carnal allure.” Also, study the explanation given in the nude model policy of Gordon College (<http://pastordavidrn.com/files/ArtPolicyOnNudeModels.pdf>).

<sup>41</sup> Madeleine L'Engle, *Walking on Water – Reflections on Faith and Art* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw, 1980), pp. 187-188.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (Harper & Row; New York, 1984), p. 47.

## A Holy Agenda for Sex Education

If the church hadn't abandoned our bodies to Gnostic prudery, we might have been the world's expert sex educators. Many older adults like myself wouldn't have grown up trying to figure out the sexual puzzle by piecing together pictures in porn magazines with the dirty jokes we heard in the schoolyard. Christian parents and Sunday school teachers could have spared us from such filth. Public high school finally rescued us with sex education sessions that told the physical truth about our bodies. Of course, we missed the moral content that could have been taught, if the church had come to our rescue first.

The destructive "sexual revolution" of the 1960-70s flourished in a theological vacuum created by the church's prudish silence in the practical areas of sexuality. The "new morality" of *doing your own thing* sowed widespread sexual immorality in this unguarded territory. Not too long afterwards, our ongoing reputation for prudery began to marginalize the church's voice in matters of sex. But the sexual realm remains *God's turf*. By shunning it, we invited that "revolution." As Calvin Seerveld said, "Any field of life where Christians withdraw simply goes to hell."

Although it's late, it's never too late for repentance. It's never too late to recant the heresy of Gnostic influences that have been allowed to infiltrate Christian thinking. It's never too late for the church to begin restitution by planning an intentional strategy of sex-education that will be as visually clear about the truth anatomically and physiologically as it is conceptually clear about the truth doctrinally and morally.

## An Environment for Sexual Healing

Closely related to theologically-sound sex education is the need for skill and wisdom in the realm of sexual healing. Gnostic dualism segregates the body's sexuality from personal identity, creating moral indifference toward sexual activity.<sup>43</sup> This same conceptual rift in our own culture has provided fertile ground for promiscuity and gender confusion.

More than any group, Christians ought to have emphatically resisted the concept of a "split personality" in our nature as *body-spirit* beings. Instead, by mistakenly ordering our thinking and self-understanding along the lines of a Gnostic isolation of the *spiritual* from the *corporeal*, we have significantly undermined our credibility as "healers."

An incarnational, wholistic approach recognizes that sins of sexual immorality may not always stem from rebellion. *Missing the mark* of godly sexual adjustment can have roots in formative personal histories. A growing number of people have been raised in homes a nurturing balance of healthy gender influences was lacking. They may have tried to meet their developmental deficits in sexual activity that is both dysfunctional and sinful. Often these elements in an individual's background and upbringing hold the key for effective healing and restoration.

We must address aberrant sexual behavior from the wisdom of God's design for each

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<sup>43</sup> Gnosticism has two faces: "Generally, the pneumatic ["spiritual"] morality is determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties. From this principle, however, two contrary conclusions could be drawn, and both found their extreme partisans: the ascetic and the libertine. The ascetic deduces from the possession of gnosis the obligation to avoid further contamination by the world and therefore to reduce the world's use to a minimum; the libertine derives from the same possession the privilege of unrestrained freedom.... Thus the pneumatic, since he is free from the power of fate, is also free from the yoke of the moral law, and all things are permitted to him." ["Gnosticism," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (Macmillan: New York, 1967), p.340].



individual's inner balance of masculine and feminine attributes. Although "*male and female*" are physical descriptions of being made in God's image, certain psychological characteristics associated with each gender spring from that same image. Because each gender has both these "*male and female*" elements, functional wholeness comes by a re-balancing in the direction that approaches the original human balance *imaged* from our Creator. This integrated conception of human nature means that physical sexual anatomy must be interpreted as God's voice in identifying personal gender.<sup>44</sup> But for restoring a person's gender balance, disrupted through sin, we have the healing *good news* of a perfectly balanced "*image of God*" vicariously found in Christ.<sup>45</sup>

God's loving grace and redemptive power undergird this theological understanding of sexuality and gender. If we preach the latter by depending on the former, we may find our congregations full of those seeking healing for a variety of sexual needs, including both bondage to promiscuity and gender confusion.

### Confronting the Porn Problem with Truth

One similar need today, both outside and inside the church, is for deliverance from porn addiction. Although typically a male problem, women are being increasingly drawn into it. The divine antidote to this widespread contagion is a God-honoring, creational view of the unclad human body. But there must be a simultaneous rejection of Gnostic prudery. This is because a prudish view of the body is itself a pornographic one. Both pornography and prudery focus only on the body's sexual impact upon the observer. As a result, a prudish view of the human body automatically lays the foundation for nudity's abuse in the obscenities of porn.

That's why I coined a new term for prudery: *porno-prudery*. Porno-prudery tries resisting the enemy with his own weapon, as if trying to fight a fire with gasoline instead of water. But we cannot defeat Satan's distortion of God's image with the lie that created the distortion. Rejecting the lie is necessary, but reforming the mind is essential. How does *Every Man* stop "bouncing eyes" at feminine beauty and start beholding it with the eyes of Christ?<sup>46</sup>

A mature, healthy *body acceptance* must replace the unnatural immaturity of porno-prudery. Christians should be reacting toward God's glory seen on clothing optional European beaches the same way missionaries observe it in "naked people" cultures. The church that upholds the God-glorifying nature of the human body, naked or clothed, will be a healing place

<sup>44</sup> LGBT activism is hard put to find allies in physiology or anatomy. Christian theology's insistence on our nature as *body-spirit* beings can point to biology's unbiased definitions for "male and female" or for "sexual union" as strong, fundamental arguments against the emotional appeals and polemics of the LGBT political agenda.

<sup>45</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4b.

<sup>46</sup> The *Every Man's Battle* trick is to "bounce eyes" away from pretty women, but read the wisdom of the famous missionary statesmen, E. Stanley Jones:

"Jesus stands for reverence for the personality of the woman. In one place it is said of Jesus, 'He laid his hands upon her: and immediately she was made straight.' When the hands of a good deal of modern teaching are laid on woman, immediately she is made crooked. Jesus insisted that she not be a means to a man's ends, but that she is an end in herself, and must be treated as such. Looking on her as a sex-being and that alone is adulterous thinking. The whole of the *pardah* idea, while ostensibly to protect the purity of the woman, looks on woman only as a creature of sex, and is therefore essentially adulterous in its thinking. The holiest among the Pharisees were called 'the bleeding Pharisees.' They went around with their eyes on the ground, lest they look on a woman, and as they were constantly bumping against trees and posts and walls, they had bleeding foreheads—hence holy. How sane and yet how severe Jesus was! He lifted up men's eyes to look frankly at life, but in that freedom there was the restraint of an inner purity." [*The Christ of the Mount* (Abandon: Nashville, 1981), p. 148-149].

where “the naked truth” can set porn-addicts free from porno-prudery’s misrepresentation of God’s image, which was usually the pathway into their addiction.<sup>47</sup>

### Rejoicing, Whether Single or Married

If male and female bodies—in the sexual union of marriage— symbolize not just God’s loving Trinitarian unity but our human redemption in a relationship with Christ, where do singles find their validation? Significantly, the first and only comprehensive theology of human sexuality was worked out by a celibate pope, and his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, continued his theme.<sup>48</sup> By their typical shunning of Catholic celibacy, Protestants miss a wealth of theological help in explaining the way sexuality and its ultimate fulfillment in eternity relate to the single person.

If earthly marriage is preached as *the* way for humans, as sexual beings, to experience “God’s best” and to realize His intention for personal happiness, a single automatically becomes a second-class citizen in God’s Kingdom. Also, popular “wisdom” about how marriage is a preventative for sexual immorality unwittingly recruits it for a role that thwarts its true purpose.

Prudery, by diligently suppressing our sexual nature, tries to curb sexual self-gratification until matrimony. But such a goal treats lustful attitudes as normal and inevitable, which they are not. Beyond disregarding the frustrated single, who may never marry, this misrepresentation of marriage may predispose the prospective couple to anticipate the wedding bed lasciviously. Vows at an altar will not prevent false ideas from bringing dishonor to the spousal bond through inordinate sexual behavior. This dysfunctional result of religious prudery can undermine or end true marital affection.

There’s a healthier, holier way for single or married people to grasp the meaning of sex. Our embodiment as sexual beings can be mentally sanctified and actively lived out in terms of our spousal union with Christ. As a corporate Bride surrendering our sexual selves to the eternal Bridegroom, our earthly sexuality becomes a springboard for relational chastity and personal productivity.

Sexuality is a divine gift of grace and a powerful force that reaches beyond marital intimacy and procreation. E. Stanley Jones wrote that, when God is allowed “to use the powers of sex as creative activity in creating newborn souls, movements, music, art, poetry, constructive achievement, . . . the whole conception of sex [is] transformed from shame and fear to acceptance and appreciation.”<sup>49</sup> Singles will never feel disenfranchised in a church where both singles and marrieds rejoice in their sexuality as an embodied display of God’s own holy and creative nature.

### New Faces in Our Congregations

The church that departs from Gnostic prudery and embraces a *body acceptance* informed by the incarnational truth about human sexuality, may see an array of new faces in its meetings.

An influx of those with damaged sexual integrity, who are seeking gender realignment or

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<sup>47</sup> The *MCAG* website ([mychainsaregone.org](http://mychainsaregone.org)) was created to help people find freedom from porn addiction solely through this approach.

<sup>48</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI’s views on *eros* and *agape* in *The Love That Satisfies* by Christopher West (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *How to Be a Transformed Person* (New York: Abington-Cokesbury, 1951), p. 216.

special sexual healing, will require new approaches to redemptive ministry in those areas.<sup>50</sup>

Artists may come to churches they once shunned for silently slandering God's masterpiece in the unclad human form. Adam and Eve, in their pre-fallen splendor, may again decorate church ceilings. Our naked Savior might reappear on the sanctuary walls in His baptism, crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>51</sup>

New young people may show up who learned from their Christian peers a more hopeful, integrated and human-friendly view of sex and the human body than secular voices have offered.

Among its new visitors and potential members may be those who grew up in a nudist home already rejecting the *body taboo* or by having long ago adopted *body acceptance* from experiencing its reality on visits to clothing optional beaches. These people, whom we once castigated as profligates or ostracized as perverts, deserve our welcome and long-overdue invitation to sit beside us under biblical preaching. In view of traditional nudism's strong ethical principles, the real "*folly and shame*" are not in their practice of mixed social nudity, but in the severely harsh condemnations they received during our long history of answering nudists "*before listening*" to their logical arguments or investigating the historical basis of their well-defended moral philosophy.<sup>52</sup>

Welcoming into our churches all these sorts of people, whom our porno-prudery formerly kept away, may be costly. Certainly, there will be resistance from church members who insist on staying religiously loyal to Gnostic prudery. Even when traditionally held attitudes they are shown to be theologically unsound, they are never easily altered. Bringing reform to our present perception and treatment of the visible human body and its sexuality is as much the challenge of addressing strong cultural training and habits as it is the task of expounding biblical truth.

### **Conclusion: the Long, Hard Work of Reformation**

H. R. Rookmaaker, a professor of art history and frequent teaching colleague of Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri, offered some helpful advice in his lectures at Westminster Seminary in 1976:

Even if we do gain a new perspective on sex and nudity and our bodies, this doesn't mean that we can change everything by tomorrow. There's too much emotion involved, because these things are so very deep and important. Also, the way we were raised and the things that have been brought to us from our own background go very deep and it's very difficult to just jump out of them. So, when a young artist comes to me and he says: "I'm in the academy, but I have difficulties in going to the life-drawing class" my first reaction would be: "Why don't you try it, because you will find out in five minutes that it's not as you think. It has nothing to do with sex. But if you continue to have difficulties, you know there's Christian freedom and there's no one who's going to force you."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> One effective approach to sexual and gender healing, based on an integration of theology, psychology, and Spirit-empowered prayer, was the work of the late Leanne Payne, described in her book, *The Healing Presence: Curing the Soul through Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Christ was baptized naked in the way of the Jewish *mikveh*, crucified naked in the way of Roman torture, and rose again naked in the Scripturally accurate way Mel Gibson finally depicted it in his movie *The Passion* (See John 20:3-7).

<sup>52</sup> Prov 18:13 (NIV). Honest research cannot avoid grappling with strong nudist arguments. Rather than broadcast ignorant assumptions about nudism, as I did, I suggest wrestling first with the "205 Arguments and Observations in Support of Naturism" (<http://www.naturistsociety.com/resources/PDF/205ARGUE.pdf>).

Having their sacred idol of a cultural *body taboo* prophetically smashed may be the need of some Christians. But the bulk of the church must be led gently, gradually. Habits of chewing legalistic fruit from “*the ‘gnosis’ of good and evil*” which perpetuates *body shame* are deep-seated. An iconoclasm of Gnostic attitudes must begin theologically and progress pastorally.

What we must *not* do is to try preserving the status quo in a peaceful religious ghetto. God expects us to “*walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*”<sup>54</sup> We must work toward banishing Gnostic ideas from the Christian church, along with Gnostic porno-prudery. Both have clearly dishonored our Creator. Both have utterly failed to bring godly change to our sex-obsessed, sexually aberrant culture.

We dare not sit on these insights. The social problems and sins in the realm of body shame and misguided sexuality are many and multiplying. They will not disappear by our ignoring them. Popular acceptance of ‘casual sex’ as normal and of exploited nudity as ordinary is catapulting society toward a dismal, destructive future. Unless we equip our children and grandchildren with a sound theology of body acceptance—first by retrieving the truth ourselves, then by applying it realistically—we have no example to offer them but that of our own present failure. Subsequent generations may simply acquiesce to the growing decadence, instead of speaking to their world prophetically and redemptively.

One pastor, with whom I shared this creational view of the body, replied that he hated to discourage me, but I might as well face the fact that “nothing would ever change,” neither in the church nor in society—both were too far into the effects of body shame to ever pull out of it. Well, I can’t do that, and I won’t.

We were clearly mistaken to think that porno-prudery would save and sanctify us. We were deceived. Never was it theologically sound, and it’s wrong to leave it as a religious legacy, to pass it on as an heirloom to tomorrow’s Christians. There’s an ever-shrinking limit to how deeply we can withdraw into a shell of neglect and denial in dealing with humanity’s sexual embodiment. The present state of social conditions show that we are either close to that limit or have already reached it. The best move we can make at this point is in a God-honoring direction. We must boldly start now to pound out a theology of human sexuality that is free from Gnostic porno-prudery’s body shame: a theology of body acceptance.

We needn’t fear that forsaking familiar and trusted taboos will open the proverbial “Pandora’s box” of Greek mythology. It was already thrown open wide by our first parents, releasing among its curses all the sexual pain and sorrow that continues to multiply around the globe today. We must go back to Genesis, back to the original creation, back to God’s original ideas and plans, which are being renewed and restored by Christ’s incarnate work. There, according to the myth’s illustration, at the bottom of Pandora’s box is one last item that both we and this world desperately need in the realm of human sexual embodiment: *theological “hope.”*

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<sup>53</sup> From “Nudity” in *The Complete Works of Hans Rookmaaker on CD-ROM* (Carlisle, UK: Piquant Editions), 3:455.

<sup>54</sup> Ephesians 5:15-16 (NKJV).