Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Pilgrim 1994) Ch. 7: 205-218.

7. Regrounding Spirituality in Embodiment

A spirituality is a specific way of living in relation to ultimate value. Early Christians understood "The Way," meaning the path of following Jesus Christ, as their distinctive spirituality. Though Jesus Christ remains the preeminent model for Christian spirituality, contemporary recognition of the dual need to glean as much of Jesus' deeds and teachings as possible from the incomplete, sometimes unclear, and occasionally contradictory accounts passed to us, and to discern into what contemporary options those deeds and teachings translate today, make following that model complicated. The relative paucity of scriptural references to sexuality by or about Jesus has unfortunately eased the way for dualistic segregation of spirituality and sexuality in the tradition.

But sexuality is intimately connected with many aspects of ultimate human concern, including both life and death, and love and intimacy.

Preceding chapters dealing with embodiment, emotional and relational development, healing, inclusiveness, intimacy, and human dignity have hinted at some parameters for a spirituality. In these last pages, I will add some final remarks about these themes and their implications for traditional Christian spirituality.

Perhaps the first thing to be observed is that the dominant cultural narrative in our post-modern society—the narrative of therapeutic well-being—is, in many ways, an inadequate reaction to many of the more repressive, neurotic, and masochistic (and of course, then, sometimes sadistic) inclinations in traditional Christian spirituality. I can remember my physician father being called during the 1960s to the local motherhouse of Catholic nuns to stitch up lacerations inflicted on their own backs by some of the more zealous sisters during Lent. At the time, these sisters and persons like them were admired by many fellow Catholics, both within the convent and outside it, for their willingness to share the pain of Jesus. My father himself, being a physician, felt some ambivalence about such activities, but stopped short of condemning the practice. In the same way among some contemporary Latin American/Filipino populations, the processions on Good Friday occasionally include devotees who have had themselves physically nailed to a cross in order to share the sufferings of Jesus. Nor is veneration of bodily suffering exclusively Catholic. Innumerable Protestants, many of them clergy, have confided to me that they concede to Catholics a corner on what they call "spirituality" and "moral rigor." This is undoubtedly one factor in the ongoing slippage in membership among liberal Protestant denominations; evangelical, fundamentalist, and Catholic churches are gaining new members (though Catholic churches, too, have lost members, especially among college-educated young since the 1960s[1]). The churches that are gaining are perceived—even by many who do not agree with them on specific teachings on sexuality and sex education, sex roles, biblical interpretation, or doctrine—as retaining a rigorous spirituality. The churches which are losing members are perceived as having abandoned traditional spirituality along with traditional moral and theological teaching, and as having no real replacement for either. These "liberal" churches are understood as "permissive," wishy-washy, and even morally opportunistic.

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[1] Dean R. Hoge, *Converts, Dropouts, and Returnees: A Study of Religious Change Among Roman Catholics* (New York: Pilgrim Press/U.S. Catholic Conference, 1981), 10, 23, 83-84.

The understanding of Christian spirituality as embracing body pain developed in early Christianity from a complex set of influences, in addition to the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The persecution of early Christians by the synagogues and then by the Roman Empire led Christians to respect and admire the faith and courage of the martyrs and their willingness to embrace suffering and death. Veneration of the martyrs for the salvation they earned through their suffering and death over time too often turned into the veneration of suffering and death as desirable ends in themselves. This confusion contributed to a tendency to interpret the divinity and virtue of Jesus Christ in terms of his accepting, and even often seeking, pain and death, some results of which we examined in the previous chapter.

By the time the risk of persecution for professing Christian faith was removed following the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire, an ascetic monastic movement had emerged as the path for those Christians who desired a more challenging Christian spirituality.[2] This monastic movement understood itself as the path for the few, for the truly zealous, for those wanting to follow more completely the difficult Way of the Jesus whose path led through the cross. The monastic spirituality forged over the centuries came to be understood not merely as the higher spiritual path, but in many ways as the only truly spiritual path. For while it was recognized that following the celibate religious or clerical lifestyle was not necessary in order to be saved, it soon became taken for granted that access to salvation lay in approximating as closely as possible monastic practices and lifestyle, regardless of one's formal state in life.[3]

Monastic spirituality therefore structured the basic model of Christian spirituality. It is ironic that this is what many Protestants, even theologically trained clergy, are unconsciously recognizing when they confide that they envy Catholics their great spiritual tradition, and regret that Protestant churches have never really developed spirituality as a theological or practical field. Such statements are not, of course, completely true. It would be ridiculous to say that neither Luther nor Calvin taught a spirituality, or that the theological successors of the reformers never addressed spirituality. But the spirituality of the reformers was only marginally different from the previous Catholic tradition. This should not be surprising, in that the reformers did not see themselves as beginning new churches so much as purifying the existing church of the rampant corruption which had arisen. That corruption seemed impossible to overcome within the existing structures of pre-Reformation Catholicism, due in large part to the self-interest of the hierarchy, especially the papacy, in continuing many of the most blatant corruptions. The dominant position among the reformers toward spirituality was to reground Christian spirituality in the traditions which had existed before the onset of corruption. Thus Protestant spirituality came to be grounded in scripture, especially the New Testament, and in early theologians, such as the Fathers of the Church, who had reflected on those scriptures.

When the Fathers seemed to diverge from scripture, commitment to *sola scriptura* was usually decisive. The reformers' most significant departure from the perspective of the Fathers concerned ascetic practices around sexuality, especially celibacy. For a number of reasons, including both widespread corruption around the practice of celibacy and the initial emergence of more companionate marriage patterns among the urban commercial class, which was the most fervently supportive of reform, the reformers, beginning with Luther, insisted on marriage as the

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[2] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 202-209.

[3] See Charles Kannengiessen, "Early Christian Bodies: Some Thoughts on Peter Brown's *The Body and Society," Religious Studies Review* 19:2 (April 1993): 126-129.

usual state of life even for ministers and celibacy as an exception limited to the very few specifically gifted with that charism.

But this defense of marriage and rejection of celibacy only modified traditional Christian spirituality; it did not challenge the basically ascetic cast of traditional spirituality. While sexuality had been largely demonic in pre-Reformation Christianity, the Reformation, at least in its dominant forms, domesticated marital sexuality. While the reformers agreed with the Roman Catholics that the primary end of sex was reproduction,[4] the Calvinist tradition brought to New England by the Puritans additionally understood sex as an important manner of cherishing and loving the spouse. What this meant for ordinary Christian spirituality in American Protestantism was that marital sex was not understood as a barrier to worship, prayer, or reception of baptism or Holy Communion. Few married couples were warned away from sex, or interrogated about it by clergy, as continued to occur among Catholics.[5] On the other hand, neither did sexuality become for any of the Protestant churches a significant avenue for either experiencing or expressing the truths of revelation. The general model of Christian spirituality in Protestantism reflected the past monastic tradition in its emphasis on solitary prayer, sacrificial suffering as the path to salvation, personal access to revelation, the divine presence, and divine grace, and the inferiority of the material to the spiritual and of the human body to the human mind/soul. Nonmarital sexuality still carried with it the scent of brimstone. The practical goodness of marital sexuality was more or less limited to its ability to prevent serious sexual sin; preachers' references tended to quote Paul on it being better to marry than to burn.[6]

Protestant modifications to previous Christian spirituality focused on the elevation of marriage as a vocation (despite, ironically, its demotion from sacramental status), the rejection of clerical celibacy, and an intensification of individualism in the search for salvation flowing from attempts to undo papal/institutional control over salvation through control of seven sacraments. There was no reexamination of either sexuality or body pleasure and their meaning in Christian life. New images of domesticated marital sex as good,[7] and marriage as companionate union of (unequal) co-workers, were added to the pool of traditional images of sex and marriage, but few if any of the inherited ascetic images and attitudes were purged from that pool.

What this has tended to produce in late twentieth-century North America is rationalist discontent with "superstitious" (Catholic) fears of the body and sex, as well as a parallel discontent with the lack of coherence in (Protestant) Christian teachings and attitudes toward sexuality. Both these dissatisfactions are understandable. But a return to past consistent and rigorous dualist approaches to sex and morality is no longer truly possible. Many people rally around those who suggest such a return in the face of contemporary North American religious pursuit of therapeutic well-being.[8] Even many unsophisticated Christians without much theological training are rightly suspicious of the well-publicized, commercially supported message that the gospel offers us peace and comfort, that faith is the path to satisfying individual desires. The Way that

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[4] This is clearest in "On Marriage" by Clement of Alexandria, often called the "defender of marriage" among the Fathers. See Peter Brown's treatment of Clement in Chapter 6 of *The Body and Society*, especially 132-139.

[5] Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1990; German ed., 1988), Chapter XX ff.

[6] I Corinthians 7:9.

[7] For a much-cited example, see Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage," *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, *The Christian in Society* 2, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), Part Three.

[8] For a good explanation of the contemporary narrative of therapeutic well-being, see Roger C. Bettsworth, *Social Ethics: An Examination of American Moral Traditions* (Louisville: Westminster, 1990), Chapter Four.

led the early Christians to suffering and death seems hardly synonymous with personal well-being, peace, and comfort.

There is a place for peace and comfort in our lives. We need to be replenished periodically. We need to be supported in difficult times. We need to be reminded of the unconditional love of God for us. But these needs must be kept in tension with the call to love our neighbor, especially the preferential option for loving the needy neighbor. Our peace, comfort, and contentment should be sought within the common good, not at the cost of either causing or tolerating injustice to others. In terms of our sexuality, too, we need sources of support and sources of challenge. We know that intimate relationships play a major role in the process of self-creation and perfection, beginning from our earliest human interactions as infants and continuing throughout our adult lives.

The task of forging a Christian spirituality which can both do justice to the Incarnation and draw on human sexuality for the energy and vision to create and support just and loving communities remains equally challenging for Protestants and Catholics. After many centuries, it still remains tragically ironic that a religion which holds as its central belief that divinity became fully and humanly embodied and then endured bodily suffering even unto death in order to redeem all embodied human persons is, among world religions, perhaps the most ambivalent about the goodness of the human body, its development,. its activities, and its appetites.

One important aspect of the Christian spiritual tradition which was negatively impacted by the ascetic dualism which prized the mind/soul and disdained the human body was the relationship of God and humanity. Instead of understanding Jesus Christ as the bridge connecting God and humanity, the dominant strains of Christian spirituality, influenced by dualism, adopted a docetic christology which has served to widen the gulf between Creator and created. A Jesus Christ understood as divine, as having human appearance but not substance, is compatible with the biblical depiction of the intimacy between Jesus and the Father. But the starting point of the Gospel writers and of the communities from which the Gospels emerged—that Jesus of Nazareth was, like them, fully human—is lost, and with it, the ability of Jesus' relation with God to serve as a model for other humans. The certainty of St. Paul that Jesus was the first to be resurrected, but not the last or only,[9] echoed in early creeds, has been lost.

The sexuality of humans has come to be understood as evidence of the inferior physicality—materiality—of humans compared to the spiritual being of God.[10] The materiality of humanity, which involves both temporality and mutability, has been crucial to the great power void understood to lie between the Creator and the created.[11] In the face of human powerlessness and ultimate lack of control over our very selves, humility in the face of the divine has been deemed appropriate. Humans are to be humble because we are less than both God and the angels, and some groups of humans—for example, women, children, and for much of the tradition, slaves—are to be especially humble because they are even less than other humans.

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[9] I Cor. 15:20-23, Rom. 6:5.

[10] I have often thought that were this not so, many of the modern churchmen of the last two centuries would have insisted on the substantive maleness of God in the face of feminist challenges to male language for God, instead of being forced to agree that God is *not* male, that maleness has merely been attributed to God by humans in an attempt to facilitate human ability to be in relation to God.

[11] Augustine, *On the Nature of Good, 1, Patrologiae Latinae* 42, 551; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Iae 9, reply to article 2.

Much of our liturgical stress has focused on achieving proper human humility. It is not for nothing that we are reminded at funerals that "You are dust and unto dust you will return." Similarly, innumerable churchmen and theologians have taught us to pray in ways that insist on our utter worthlessness in the face of God's greatness. Some of the most popular hymns in Christian history magnify the greatness of God as one who exhausts goodness while imaging humanity as totally corrupt, powerless, and dependent. Many such liturgical manifestations of Christian spirituality are entirely appropriate. We humans are liable to sin, and we do experience graced moments of revelation in which we clearly recognize both the seriousness of the evil we knowingly choose and our own fallibility in recognizing good. In such moments, it is appropriate to be overwhelmed by the goodness and power of God which serve as resources for our own efforts at conversion. But two common aspects of the traditional treatment of humility are not appropriate: 1) rejecting or ignoring human dignity, and 2) condemning or discouraging human initiative.

Valerie Saiving (Goldstein)'s classic feminist essay "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," published in the *Journal of Religion* in 1960,[12] pointed out that Christian depictions of sin in terms of pride and ambition serve a useful moral purpose for males, whose gender socialization in the West predisposes them toward reaching out, doing, achieving, possessing, making their mark on the world. Religious warnings against pride and reminders of the social limits to ambition serve, in tension with gender socialization, to delineate the parameters of acceptable behavior, ruling out both irresponsible, dependent passivity and unbridled individual ambition at the expense of others. But the same Christian definition of sin only reinforces the messages of gender socialization for women. For women there is no creative tension between dependent and independent, between controlling others and abdicating responsibility for one's own life. Christian definitions of sin reinforce female socialization in pressing women toward irresponsible passivity and dependence.

Christian tradition within existing patriarchy has understood the God/human relationship in oppositional terms. If God is good and perfect, then humans are sinful; if God is all-powerful, humans are impotent; if God is creator, the most humans can legitimately hope to be is stewards. We have also been taught that God *polices* this unequal relationship.

When our tradition has referred to our God as a jealous God, it has not always referred to human temptations to worship other gods. Sometimes the reference has been to human aspirations to be like God. The tower of Babel (Babylon) story in Genesis 11:1—9 seems to parallel the message in the story of the Fall in Genesis 3: God is jealous of human attempts to "make a name for themselves"[13] or live forever[14]—attempts to be like God**. Too much of our prayer over the centuries has been designed to appease an insecure, jealous God who resists sharing creativity and responsibility with humans, and desires instead confessions of worthlessness, professions of praise, sacrificial offerings, and abject obedience.** It is this understanding of God as requiring a huge gulf between God and humans that has underlain myriad arguments against scientific exploration, intervention, and technology. For centuries we have heard not only atheists and agnostics engage in paeans to human science and technology as replacing the unlimited power and creativity of God, but, from far too many representatives of religion, also

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[12] Reprinted in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 25-42.
[13] Genesis 11:4.
[14] Gen. 3:22.

arguments that: "If God had wanted the races to mix, He wouldn't have separated them with oceans, mountains, and deserts," "If God had wanted humans to fly, He would have given them wings," "God made smallpox (or cholera or bubonic plague or AIDS) with a purpose; we should not attempt to interfere with immunizations or cures," or "Who do these scientists think they are, interfering in the way God distributed DNA to 'improve' the Creator's work?"

But our tradition also contains more positive descriptions of the divine will or relationship with humans. The God of the Israelites and of Jesus professes to be uninterested in sacrifice and praise from humans; God demands human faithfulness that takes the form of active justice, of caring for the weak and oppressed:

> I hate, I despise your festivals; I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs, I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like the waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream. (Amos 5: 21—24)

The God who deigns to wrestle with Jacob (Genesis 32: 22—31), to pass between the rocks so that Moses can view God safely (Exodus 33: 12—23), and to debate with the stricken job (Job 38: 1ff) is not jealous of human creative power and responsibility, but rather is supportive of honest human attempts to understand and cooperate with God, to learn the limits and responsibility of humanity. It is into this latter strain that the Gospels fall, for the Good News of Jesus Christ was not a call to passively await God's action in history, but rather a call to accept responsibility for preparing self and world to cooperate with God's saving action in history. To be creative is not to co-opt God's creativity; to make responsible decisions is not to reject the Creator's power and authority. Augustine is right that "our hearts are restless till they rest in thee, O Lord." But growing *toward* God inevitably entails also growing more *like* God. This is not a moral problem, but an experience of gift.

When the Yahwist creation story insists that humans were made in the image and likeness of God, it calls us to act in a divine manner: justly, lovingly, responsibly. Insistence that only God has dignity and worth raises obstacles to our own self-love, undermines our ability to believe in God's love for us as individuals, and accustoms us to view victimization of ourselves and others with callousness. The U.S. army officer who observed in Vietnam that "we had to destroy the village in order to save it" has been all too frequently paralleled in the churches by pastors and theologians who have counted as nothing massive human suffering inflicted in the name of God, in order to "save" the very persons injured. The many different liberation theologies from around the world which have begun to give voices to groups which have been theologically mute throughout most of history are making ever clearer that examples of spiritual riches which the tradition touts as achieved through acute suffering are unrepresentative and misleading.[15] The

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[15] Not only have Latin American liberation theologians been critical of the transformation of material poverty into evangelical poverty (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973], 288-289), but some have attacked elements of the tradition regarding evangelical poverty. Hugo Assman stated at the 1975 Detroit *Theology in the Americas* conference, "The epistemological privilege of the poor is a privilege of the struggling poor person of one struggling in an effective way. Struggling means loving in an effective way with a revolutionary horizon, with strategic goals and practical praxis steps. I cannot accept a general privilege of the poor. Many do, but they forget the poor are oppressed and have the oppressor within themselves." (Sergio Torres, ed., *Theology in the Americas* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976], 300.)

sufferings endured under poverty, enslavement, and subordination serve at least as often to create despair, cruelty, and death as they do to produce faith, courage, and love.

As North American Christians learn from the poor and victimized around the world and in our midst, we become more and more aware of the essential integrity of body experience and spirituality. As this awareness grows, we must become more critical of the insensitivity of our inherited tradition to the integrity of body experience and spirituality. Many elements of classical Christian spirituality are tainted by ascetic distortions of the God/human relationship which entered the tradition linked to valuable spiritual insights. For example, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* is perhaps the classic Christian conversion story. And yet in reading Augustine's account in the *Confessions* of the life and virtue of his mother, St. Monica, with whom he credits his own conversion, modern Christians feel something amiss:

> [W]hen she arrived at a marriageable age, she was given to a husband and served "him as her lord." (Eph. 5:21) She strove to win him to you, speaking to him about you through her conduct, by which you made her beautiful, an object of reverent love, and a source of admiration to her husband. She endured offenses against her marriage bed in such wise that she never had a quarrel with her husband over this matter. She looked forward to seeing your mercy upon him, so that he would believe in you and be made chaste. But in addition to this, just as he was remarkable for his kindness, so was he given to violent anger. However, she had learned to avoid resisting her husband when he was angry, not only by deeds but even by words. When she saw that he had curbed his anger and become calm and that the time was opportune, then she explained what she had done, if he happened to be inadvertently disturbed.
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> In fine, when many wives, who had better-tempered husbands but yet bore upon their faces signs of disgraceful beatings, in the course of friendly conversation criticized their husbands' conduct, she would blame it all on their tongues. Thus she would give them serious advice in the guise of a joke. From the time, she said, they heard what are termed marriage contracts read to them, they should regard those documents as legal documents making them slaves. Hence, being mindful of their condition, they should not rise up in pride against their lords. Women who knew what a sharp-tempered husband she had to put up with marveled that it was never reported or revealed by any sign that Patricius had beaten his wife or that they had differed with one another in a family quarrel, even for a single day. When they asked her confidentially why this was so, she told them of her policy, which I have described above. Those who acted upon it, found it to be good advice and were thankful for it; those who did not act upon it, were kept down and abused.[16]

In this account, Monica's virtue and wisdom are manifest in her voluntary acceptance of the status of slave, and they are not negated by her blaming victims of violence for their own victimization. How can this be reconciled with human dignity, with the fact that humans were made in the image and likeness of God's own self, or with the gospel of Jesus Christ? While no one should be blamed for acquiescing to violence against them, whether in order to avoid pain, injury, or death or to comply with belief in nonresistance to evil, neither should they be blamed for *naming* violent abuse as wrong.

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[16] Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), Bk 9, Ch 9, 218-219.

Too often within our tradition we have interpreted Jesus of Nazareth as accepting with embodiedness the status of slave in order to save the human race.[17] This sacrifice on his part has then been interpreted to require that humans imitate that slave status,[18] as if that were the appropriate status of humans before the Lord. This has frequently been what we have meant by humility. But the life of Jesus is not the life of a slave. It was, in fact, his claiming of power and authority which served to antagonize the organized groups in his society to kill him. Jesus gathered around himself a group of followers who were phenomenally successful in spreading his gospel precisely because he mediated to them so well the presence of the Divine One whom they all sought. While attempts to replace that Divine One with alternatives of our own conjuring is rightly condemned, we should attempt to become holy, as God in heaven is holy. Paul was right to teach: "Be imitators of God, as beloved children." True Christian humility is not abasing ourselves in denying our own dignity, but learning to live with accurate recognition of our true achievements and faults-that is, in learning to share God's view of us. Paul wrote:

> For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work, then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. (Gal. 6: 3—4)

It would be wrong to interpret Paul to mean that all persons are as nothing. Paul himself spends a great deal of time and effort in the Epistles wrestling with temptations both to claim no achievements for himself, and to claim full responsibility for the successes in which he has had a role. He struggles to understand how he can be both dependent upon God's grace in all, and yet responsible for his own actions.[19] Similarly, in comparison to the other apostles, Paul wants to both acknowledge that they are all co-workers in the same historical project, and defend himself against slights by citing his own efforts and sufferings. This struggle in Paul is paradigmatic. We are all called to true humility: an accurate understanding of our relationship to God and others. We are called to recognize the many ways that each of us is both inseparable from God and others and dependent upon them for that which we lack. At the same time, we are called to recognize the talents entrusted to us, and develop and use them so that we become co-creators with God, sustaining and expanding God's providence for others. False humility, grounded in negative assessments of human embodiment, serves as an excuse for sloth and irresponsibility. We are the children of God, just as we are the children of our parents. Being children of God does not mandate our remaining minors. That God our divine parent does not grow old and therefore more dependent, like human parents, is no excuse for us to remain permanent children.

We are not faced with a choice of becoming adults and putting God aside, or remaining minors forever. It is possible to be an adult and still be faithful to a parent, still offer the respect and honor due a good parent, and still carry forward joint projects with that parent. In fact, with God, as with our human parents, we often discover that disowning them is more easily said than done, for God and human parents live within our very selves because we take on the traits of those we have loved.

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[17] Perhaps the best-known scriptural reference on this point is Phil. 2:5-8: "Jesus Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of God."

[18] Paul then wrote of himself as a follower of this Christ: "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave for all, that I might win the more (for Christ)," (I Cor. 9:19).

[19] See, for example, 1 Corinthians 9, 2 Corinthians 10-12, Philippians 3, and Galatians 2.

Contemporary Christians are creating new forms of spirituality based in reflection on embodied human experience. Forms of spirituality always reflect the particular historical situation in which they arise. For example, it is not surprising that, in the aftermath of the massive social, political, economic, and technological changes which came together in the 1960s and 1970s, spiritual attention turned to individual needs for peace, comfort, and personal security as realized in the search for therapeutic well-being. At the same time, there are much larger, longer-lived trends in spirituality, as in history in general. Until the twentieth century, Christianity and much of the Western world in general have demonstrated for nearly 2,000 years an otherworldly, ascetic spirituality in which materiality, and especially sexuality, were suspicious, if not actually sinful. Present inroads on that tradition insist that: 1) bodily experience can reveal the divine, 2) affectivity is as essential as rationality to true Christian love, 3) Christian love exists not to bind autonomous selves, but as the proper form of connection between beings who become human persons in relation, and 4) the experience of body pleasure is important in creating the ability to trust and love others, including God. But it is still not clear whether our own age will turn out to be the pivotal point at which Christian spirituality transforms itself by wholeheartedly embracing the body and materiality, or whether our age is more of a historical blip, such as the Renaissance, in which antimaterialist asceticism is briefly arrested.