

Pryor, Adam. *Body of Christ Incarnate for You: Conceptualizing God's Desire for the Flesh*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. 213 + xvii. ISBN 978-1-4985-2268-7. \$85.00.

Adam Pryor's book will be of interest to scholars of Michael Polanyi and William Poteat, given its focus on the body and embodiment or incarnation. Pryor engages in dialogue with an impressive array of thinkers: Patristic theologians and the Council of Chalcedon, Anselm, Luther, Barth, Pannenberg, Moltmann, Gottfried Thomasius, Kierkegaard, David Jensen, Sallie McFague, Bonaventure, Tillich, Rita Nakashima Brock, Merleau-Ponty, Gerald O'Collins, Donna Haraway, Jeanine Thweatt-Bates, Niels Henrik Gregersen, Laurel Schneider, Jean-Luc Marion, and Richard Kearney. Though familiar with many of these figures, I learned more about each through Pryor's analysis (it would have been helpful to have these thinkers listed in the table of contents in some fashion).

While respecting all those with whom he engages, Pryor ultimately does not find all of them equally helpful in forging a viable Christian understanding of the incarnation. As he sees it, the root of the problem lies in the fact that for many theologians incarnation is secondary to soteriology. He confesses that Advent and Christmas, the seasons most oriented to incarnation, are his favorites in the cycle of the church year. Pryor argues salvation comes in the first instance through the very incarnation of God's promiscuous, servant, and liberating love by Jesus

the Christ. In a reversal of the traditional ordering, resurrection hope is secondary as the "doxological" sign or claim (165, 191) of the reality and value of the incarnation.

I agree with Pryor's reordering, and also with his claim that the incarnation of divine love is not limited to Jesus the Christ (111, 119, 149). Perhaps my Methodist roots are evident here, i.e., John Wesley's counter to classical Calvinism's emphasis on total depravity and the affirmation of the possibility of perfection in love. Pryor rejects the two-natures doctrine of Chalcedon, but I would offer in this vein a de-supernaturalized version, wherein a human being can be said to be fully divine in the way that is humanly possible, namely, by incarnating God's love.

Pryor gets concrete about embodiment in his chapter on "Jesus in the Flesh," where he focuses on the temptation, transfiguration, and healings according to Luke's gospel, as Jesus's relationship with God entails that bodily and social power will be used to serve others in mutual relationships (92-111). Following his introduction, Pryor acknowledges Lessing's ditch and the problems of relating ontological and historical truths. Pryor sees the distinctiveness of Jesus's incarnation of divine love as being its uninterrupted and continuous nature over the entirety of his lifetime (152-153, 165). At this point I wish Pryor had referred back to Lessing's ditch and clarified the epistemic basis of such a claim, for this claim of Christ's distinctiveness—which

I myself endorse as a Christian—seems to lack any clear historical evidence. It seems rather to be a profession of the faith of the church, starting with the New Testament portrait of Jesus as the Christ being the bearer of the New Being, to use Tillich's language.

Pryor rightly contends that taking embodiment seriously rules out any simple contrast of subject/object or self/other, world: "The body is the chiasmic location where sensed and sensing cross one another without ever becoming identical or simultaneous" (74). He deals with this issue more theoretically in the chapter entitled, "Being-With in the Flesh," and more concretely in his chapter on "Cyborg Bodies." I found this latter chapter particularly interesting as Pryor shares his knowledge of cases of the interfacing of the human body with technology. While Pryor is absolutely right that no pure subject exists apart from the world or object, nor a pure object apart from its relationships, there is a tendency for him to picture self and world/object as blurring. While one can characterize mystical experiences as involving a fuzzy blurring, things are not that simple for more ordinary experiences. His thinking on the cyborg and on self-world relationships more generally would benefit from incorporation of Polanyi's tacit dimension and the from-to nature of knowledge and action, whereby we rely tacitly on our proximate bodies (and the extension of our bodies through tools, technology, and traditions) in order to attend focally to something distal in the world. Polanyi's

classic example (also used by Merleau-Ponty) of a blind person using a cane to focus on what the end of the cane touches comes readily to mind. Under this model, our embodied subjectivity varies from situation to situation, as we rely on varying forms of embodiment to focus on different objects and different aspects of our natural-social world. Yet the basic biological reality of the organism as distinct from yet consonant with its environment—the rest of the world—is maintained. Pryor sometimes inveighs against "dermal metaphysics," which maintains that our bodies end with our skin (66, 118, 144-146, 152). A Polanyian would agree that we certainly can and do extend our bodies beyond our skin. Yet it is also the case that we die if our skin is breached too extensively.

In considering incarnation and formal sacraments as well as the sacramentality of incarnating divine love in any moment and context, Pryor draws on the thought of Richard Kearney. Pryor finds particularly helpful Kearney's focus on welcoming the stranger as guest. I resonate with Pryor's affirmation of the sacramentality of the in-breaking of divine love when we welcome the other. In appropriating Kearney's "anatheism" ("after God-ism"), Pryor believes he has found "an alternative to either a naïve return to the God of onto-theology or an atheistic rejection of the very notion of God." On my reading of Kearney, however, Kearney retains the word "God" precisely to refer to those instances of welcoming the stranger as guest—

nothing more. Thus, “God” is identified with a part of the world in a non-panthestic naturalism. Pryor, though, seems to want to preserve a notion of God as in some sense the ultimate *source* of the world and of instances of the stranger being welcomed. Additionally, Pryor draws upon Niels Henrik Gregersen’s notion of deep incarnation, which posits the possibility of an eschatological fulfillment of all bodies—not just human ones—through Christ’s incarnation and resurrection (143-147), and mentions in a footnote Robert Russell’s account of the eschatological fulfillment of “the entirety of spacetime” (193). Clearly Gregersen and Russell hold to much more traditional concepts of God and divine power than Kearney’s atheism. All of this is to say I would have appreciated a more extensive exposition of Pryor’s own sense of the God who was incarnate in Christ and may be incarnate in each one of us; Pryor’s previous book, *The God Who Lives*, may cover some of this ground.

I especially appreciate Pryor’s “Conclusion,” subtitled “Incarnational Wild Things” (189-193), a title that draws on Pryor’s experience of reading Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* to his children. I find Pryor’s account of the wildness of creation and the freedom of individual beings a refreshing reminder of the greatness of God’s creative activity. As Pryor so eloquently puts it, incarnation “is a wild thing that shapes our bodies into ways of being-with one another that otherwise remain impossible possibilities. Pressing us to instantiate the flesh with

loving abandon—to become a chiasm of self and world that is rooted in the persistent advance of love—the incarnation both deep and promiscuous reveals an intertwining of God and creation that cannot be rent apart” (193).

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