

THE BROKEN BODY IN A BROKEN WORLD:
A CONTRIBUTION TO A
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON FROM A
DISABLED POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

There are considerable advantages for a Christian theology of disability when the Christian doctrine of the person takes as its starting point not the image of God but the broken body of Christ. This starting point leads us away from aspects of Christian tradition which tend to marginalise disabled people toward those which emphasise disability as an alternative theology to the theology of perfection and power. The implications of such a theology of broken-ness are illustrated from the New Testament and the subsequent development of the doctrine of the Heavenly Session. The article concludes by suggesting a distinctive ministry of disabled people.

Key words

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Finding a Starting Point: Image or Body?

From a disabled point of view, there are difficulties in using the concept of the image of God as a starting point for a Christian understanding of the person. These difficulties have to do with the perfection which is suggested by the analogy. The image of God as portrayed in the Bible is that of a being whose perfect knowledge is attained through the perfection of the divine senses. When Hezekiah prays, 'Incline your ear, o Lord, and hear; open your eyes, o Lord, and see' (Is. 37:17) the assumption is not that God is hard of hearing or has a sight defect. God never has a mobility problem. 'If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.' (Ps. 139:8) It is generally recognised today that locating the image of God mainly in the intellect is unsatisfactory because it limits the degree to which slow learners and people with mental disorders can be thought of as being in God's image. However, even when the image of God is conceived of as residing in such human attributes as the capacity to love or to possess imagination and freedom, there is a tendency to create a kind of sliding scale such that those whose freedom is impaired by disability and those whose capacity to love is impaired by pain are more or less excluded. If the image of God is conceived of as residing in relationality, then those whose human relations are damaged are at a disadvantage. Of course, it is agreed that the image of God has been defaced by sin, but the problem is that, due to a persistent tendency to infer inner sinful states from outer imperfections, disabled people tend to be regarded as particular evidences of the fall of Adam and Eve. This is why the eschatological vision describes the removal of disabilities. 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.' (Is. 35:5-6) Because God is perfect, the image of God must be found in that which is perfect, or in that which is moving towards perfection. The problem lies in the fact that the divine perfection is imaged upon or is a projection of the ideals of a perfect human being or a perfect human life. It is this convergent or unequivocal model of perfection, this implicit refusal to acknowledge the multiplicity of the genuinely human which leads many disabled people to search for a different starting point for a Christian theology of the person.^[1]

From Image to Body

The main purpose of the present study is to suggest that the real humanity of disabled people might be better protected if we take as our starting point not the image of God but the human body itself. That is not to deny that the idea that all human life is sacred because 'made in the image of God' is not a significant defense against all attempts to diminish the humanity of any human being. Nevertheless, if we were to complement a theology of the human drawn from the *imago dei* with an anthropology drawn from the human body certain advantages would follow.

However, an immediate disadvantage springs to mind. The *imago dei* safeguards the uniqueness of human beings by indicating such human characteristics as the capacity for freedom and love, or the human responsibility as the steward of creation, whereas the human body is similar to the bodies of other species. In this sense, starting a Christian doctrine of the person from the image of God seems to protect the distinctively human but starting from the body seems to lose the human in a more general biological category.

On the other hand, perhaps this is not a bad thing. When we speak disparagingly of our animal nature, we insult animals. Our animal nature refers, so we think, to our capacity for cruelty, murder and lust but animals have needs not lusts, kill only to eat, and are incapable of deliberately planned cruelty. Moreover, to start our thinking from the body enables our theology to develop intimately with the study of biology, and recent work in the biological origins of religion makes this an attractive option.^[2] Finally, when we begin our theological anthropology from the body, we are drawn immediately into such central Christian symbols as the body of Christ, which links anthropology not only to the incarnation but also to the church and the sacraments. A Christian

theological anthropology based upon the body thus has a number of advantages.

Body Theology as a Theology of Disability

Although a distinction is sometimes made^[3] between physical disability, meaning for example the loss of limbs or the loss of bodily functions, and (on the other hand) sensory disability (loss of sight or hearing) and mental disability including mental illness and psychological disorder, there is an important sense in which all disability is physical. It is the body which is disabled, whether one thinks of the brain, the eye or the foot as being a disabled organ. A characteristic of the experience of disability is that one becomes particularly sensitive to one's body. My twenty-one year old son told me that he never really noticed that he had legs until he broke one of his feet in a fall and had to use crutches for three months. Of course, the embodied character of disability is not its only feature, and many disabled people claim that it is the social rather than the physical aspects of disability which are most alienating. My son not only discovered his legs; he discovered that he could not carry a pint of beer from the bar to the table where his friends were seated, and was left feeling foolish standing by the bar wondering if someone would come and help him.

One must also realise that the degree to which a physical condition is disabling is affected by the surrounding culture. A woman who could not walk more than half a mile would be considered normal in, say, Los Angeles, where her limitation would not be noticed, but in a village community, perhaps in parts of Africa, where women were expected to walk several miles each day fetching water for their families someone who could only walk half a mile would be severely disabled.^[4]

The study of disability is therefore an inter-disciplinary enquiry, involving not only physiology and psychology but also sociology and cultural studies. Nevertheless these various disciplines all involve an interpretation of the body under certain conditions. Whatever the discipline be, disability studies involve hermeneutics, and the text of disabled hermeneutics is the body.

The Body as Epistemic Reality

The body is a suitable starting point for a Christian anthropology and especially for a theology of disability not only because disability sits, as it were, in the body but because the body is the source of our knowledge not only of ourselves but of the world and everything in it. In other words, the body is an epistemic principle. An older epistemology regarded human knowledge as founded in absolute ideas or transcendental realities, whether those of Plato or of Hegel, which were merely received by human beings. The British empirical epistemology regarded human knowledge as coming to us through our bodily senses but did not emphasise or understand the contribution which our own bodies make to the character and reception of this sense-based knowledge. Much twentieth century linguistic philosophy regarded knowledge as being expressed in propositions. Knowledge always takes a linguistic form. Truth abides in words. Only sentences can express truthful ideas. While it is possible that all three theories of knowledge do make a contribution to understanding the character of human knowledge, more recent philosophical work has drawn attention to the body itself as the locus and origin of knowledge.^[5] This emphasis upon the body is a development of the constructivist epistemology, in which human knowledge is regarded as a human creation. Human knowledge is created by humans. Human knowledge takes the form of constructs, which express the social and political position of the knower. The emphasis upon bodily knowledge takes this further by pointing out that we know the world as our bodies know it.^[6]

This is important for a philosophy and a theology of disability because it enables us to postulate the existence of several worlds of human knowledge. The experience which a blind person has of the world is so significantly different from that of sighted people that we can speak of it as a constructed world. This emphasises the independence and integrity, the wholeness of the blind world, and sets blindness free from being interpreted merely in terms of deficiency. Blindness is not

just something that happens to ones eyes; it is something that happens to ones world. This enables us to also relativise the hegemonous assumptions of many sighted people, who do not always realise that they live in a world which is a projection of their sighted bodies, but make the mistake of thinking that the world is just like that, the way they see it. Such people are never able to respect or understand blind people, but will always regard them as being merely excluded from the sighted world, and not as having a more or less independent world of their own.^[7]

The significance of this for Christian anthropology lies in the fact that it emphasises the plurality of human worlds, and the recognition of the plurality immediately relativises the absolute claims of a single, dominant world. There are many kinds of human bodies, some young, some old, some male, others female, some with arms and legs, others without arms or legs, some who hear, others who do not hear, some who are rich and others who are poor, some who oppress others and some who are oppressed. This enables us to make a further distinction between the human worlds which are, so to speak, natural in that they spring from the body as natural body-knowledge, and (on the other hand) those worlds which have no bodily basis, no natural epistemological character, but are the social constructions of power and greed. When we recognise natural epistemic worlds, we can also recognise unnatural ones. It is true that the rich and poor know different worlds, but this is an epistemic distinction stemming from the experience of injustice; it is also true that the blind and the sighted know different worlds, but this is a natural epistemic distinction, stemming from the physical characteristics of the blind and sighted body. The distinctive character of the blind world may be further emphasised by the fact that many blind people are economically disadvantaged. Blind people who live in poverty live in a world of blindness which is shared by wealthy blind people, but they also live in a socially generated world of poverty. The unnaturally generated economic worlds should be criticised and rejected but the bodily worlds of blindness and deafness should be understood and respected.

We see then that a Christian anthropology must begin by emphasising the relativising impact of plurality. Only when this is done can the experiences of disabled people be honoured as making a positive contribution to the fullness of human life, and only when this is done can the artificial divisions between unnatural human worlds be recognised for what they are - the disembodied shadows of evil which settle upon and oppress human bodies. The affirmation of one category of world makes possible the denunciation of another category.

This is one of the reflections which has led to the appearance of body theology as a genre of theological literature.^[8] Of course, not all body theology springs from the epistemology I have described. Much of it is motivated by a rejection of the older Christian tradition which tended to dismiss the body, regarding it as the source of evil temptation and of sin. Body theology is often an attempt to reclaim the wholeness of the human person.^[9] Much body theology comes from women's theology, and challenges the domination of male ways of understanding the world. By emphasising the characteristics of the female body, the female theologians have drawn attention to the characteristics of the female life cycle, of the female experience of life and of women's religious experience.^[10] Other contributions of body theology are motivated by a desire to re-interpret Christian ethics in a more realistic sense, emphasising the homophobic character of much traditional Christian sexual ethics.^[11] Body theology also regards itself as a theology of the incarnation, emphasising the embodied character of the divine revelation in which the word became flesh.

While not all theologies of disability can be regarded as examples of body theology,^[12] there is no doubt that many of the most powerful interpretations of disability express epistemological aspects of body-experience.^[13] They may not be specifically theological but spring from 20th century philosophical schools such as phenomenology and existentialism. This is why in our search for a Christian anthropology we must go beyond a philosophy of the disabled body and find a

specifically Christian theology.

John Hull's original paper

Why is a Theology of Disability Necessary?

The search for a theology of disability arises from the fact that Christian disabled people, often inspired by contemporary social and philosophical approaches towards an understanding of disability, are dissatisfied with the place that disability occupies in many interpretations of Christian faith. The miracles of Jesus in healing disabled people are not always regarded by disabled people as offering them hope^[14] but on the contrary are looked upon as encouraging an attitude of charity and of mission towards them. Many disabled people feel that their human dignity is taken from them by the expectation that they should, as Christians, be healed by Christ. This brings us to the connection between disability and sin. In spite of frequent denials, disabled people in many cultures report that they are often regarded as deficient in faith, or as having positively sinned.^[15]

The connection between disability and sin goes much deeper than the suspicion that with a little bit more faith disabled people could be miraculously restored. It is rooted in the biblical view of the world, which became the basis for an articulate structure of Christian doctrine. This describes a cosmic history falling into three distinct periods. In the first period, the created universe was in a state of blissful perfection. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were in a state of perfect humanity, unblemished in their bodies, in their relationships with each other and in their communion with God. The second period runs from the fall of Adam and Eve through to the second coming of Christ and the Day of Judgement. The Bible is almost wholly concerned with this second period, which is the story of redemption. It is the period of grace, including the election of Israel and the calling into existence of the church after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The third and final period will be the consummation of history, when once again pain and evil will be banished and human beings will again be in perfect communion with God in a restored creation, much more enduring than the first condition since the human state will be transformed by the vision of God.^[16]

In this scheme of things, there is no place for disabled people either in the first or the final worlds. Disability is a characteristic of the second age. Although disabled people may not necessarily have sinned or brought their condition upon themselves through their own sin or that of their parents, their very existence is a continual reminder of the imperfect human condition, in to which humanity has fallen and from which we hope to be redeemed. Even when the connection is not with sin itself, disability is associated with an imperfect world, a sort of natural disaster like earthquakes and hunger and death itself, indicative of a disturbed creation. Hence the expectation that in the Messianic age the lame will leap like a hart and the tongues of the dumb shall sing. (Is. 35: 5-6) Everything will be restored, as creation, which at present groans in its bondage, is brought into the full liberty of the sons and daughters of God. (Rom. 8: 19)

It is this belief, often expressed through a more-or-less unconscious attitude towards disability itself which becomes attached to disabled people. Men and women, boys and girls with disabilities become the concrete instances of a general phenomenon of disability which itself is part of the imperfect world. It is because of associations such as these that many disabled people have come to believe that far from being a power for their emancipation Christian faith is a major source of the social and economic disadvantage that they suffer. Christian faith, to put it more bluntly, is not seen as part of the answer but as part of the problem. This is why disabled people who wish to regard themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ and to remain within the Christian church are struggling to formulate various theologies of disability.

Resources for a Theology of Disability

While it is true that Christian theology has elements which appear to exclude and marginalise people with disabilities, the situation is far from simple. Christian faith is a complex web of texts,

traditions and symbols which to some extent defies systematisation, as is indicated by the thousands of Christian denominations. There are even theologians who regard the very concept of a systematic theology as being un-Christian. Moreover, the constant re-interpretation of aspects of Christian faith, a process without which it would no longer be a living stream of human experience and a continuing revelation, means that some aspects of faith become disjointed from others. It is the constant task of systematics to restore and reunify faith. The result of this is that Christian faith has become for us a huge resource of ideas, lives and traditions, from which the modern believer, whether a woman, or a black person, or a person suffering oppression, or a disabled person, can pick and mix. Peter Burger has described this situation as a heretical imperative,^[17] and Robert Bellah has distinguished between the compact symbolism of earlier Christian periods and the complex symbolism of our own.^[18]

So it is that the Christian person with a disability in search of a theology may find that although the symbols of the fall, the miraculous healings and the Eschaton are not helpful, there are other symbols which may offer more constructive suggestions. For example, the apostle Paul is much maligned for his negative attitudes towards the ministry of women but is to be praised for his interpretations of disability. It may be that Paul himself had a disability, or had experienced some painful loss, possibly a partial loss of sight.^[19] There is no doubt that Paul was extremely conscious of the body. There is no other biblical author who speaks so frequently and with such a variety of images of the body as does Paul.^[20]

The Body in Pauline Thought

Paul shows a striking sensitivity towards the body. For example, sexual malpractice (as Paul understood it) is not simply unethical but dishonours the bodies of those who engage in it. (Rom. 1:24) The body of an old man is practically dead because the man is no longer capable of procreation (Rom. 4:19), but if a man has intercourse with a prostitute he becomes one body with her. (I Cor. 6:16) Once again, it is not exactly the moral consideration, or the possibly harmful effect of such a relationship upon the parties, but the way it creates a rather unpleasant body for the one who has relations with the prostitute. 'Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself'. (I Cor. 6:18) It is in the body that sin reigns (Rom. 6:12) and therefore it can be called a 'body of sin' (Rom. 6:6), and thus 'the body is dead because of sin'. (Rom. 8:10) It is a 'lowly body' or 'a body of humiliation'. (Phil. 3:21)

The Christian faith redeems the body (Rom. 8:23); the body belongs to the Lord and the Lord to the body (I Cor. 6:13). The body of a Christian has become the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19) and consequently Christians are to glorify God in their bodies (I Cor. 6:20).

Paul imagines that his body has the functions of a woman's body (Gal. 4:19). And he hopes that Christ will be exalted in his body, whether in life or death (Phil. 1:20). When the Spirit or breath enters into the bodies of Christians, they are given life in spite of their mortality (Rom. 8:11). It is the body of the believer that is to be presented to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

These passages indicate the curious emphasis which Paul places upon the body, often speaking of the body when we today would more naturally refer to our lives, rather than our bodies. It is possible that this sensitivity was produced by Paul's own experience of physical suffering, loss or disability. He carries the marks of Jesus branded on his body (Gal. 6:17) and he is conscious of always carrying in his body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be made visible in his body (II Cor. 4:10). Of course, such expressions may refer to the persecutions which the Christian missionaries suffered and Paul often uses the plural. There is no doubt, however, about the personal nature of the experience reported in II Cor. 12:7, the thorn in the flesh. These expressions may refer to the scars or wounds caused by the Roman beatings or possibly to some other type of physical infirmity. We can be sure of this: all experiences of these kinds tend to make us acutely conscious of

our bodies.

When we consider the number of references to the body in Paul's letters (and we have only referred to a few of them) it becomes possible to consider the theology of Paul as an example of body theology. Paul's theological epistemology appears to have been grounded in his body, in life as his body knew it.

The Broken Body of Christ

It is this body theology that helps us to understand the intense attraction which Paul felt for the body of Jesus Christ. Just as he knew the world which his own body knew, he was grasped by the world which the body of Jesus knew. His body, indeed, had become the body of Jesus, bearing upon it the marks which the body of Jesus bore. Jesus had delivered him from his body of death (Rom. 7:24) and one day his body of humiliation would become like the glorified body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). His physical body would become a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:44). The body of Christ was to be found as the church (I Cor. 12:27), since baptism had joined all believers into one body (I Cor. 12:13). So vivid was Paul's sense of Christians having actually become the body of Christ that the concept became an argument against prostitution, not as a matter of obedience to a commandment or consistency with a life of discipleship, but because it would be impossible to take members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute (I Cor. 6:15).

The central feature of Paul's body-knowledge of Jesus' body-knowledge was that it was broken. 'When he gave thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me"' (I Cor. 11:24). This is the earliest record of what took place at the Last Supper, and broken-ness lies at the heart of it. It is because of its broken-ness that partakers of the bread proclaim the death of Christ (I Cor. 11:26), for in his death he was broken. Not to discern the broken-ness is not to discern the body of Christ (I Cor. 11:29). It is because the original unity is broken into a multiplicity that the multiplicity becomes a unity. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor. 10:17). The unity of the church is recreated again and again as the broken body is restored into the oneness of Christ's body the church.

It is not only in the emphatic body theology of Paul that we find this meaning of broken-ness. In all three synoptic gospels Jesus is described as breaking the bread at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19). The story of the feeding of the crowd with the loaves and fishes evidently made a great impression upon the early church since variations of it are recorded no less than five times in the synoptic gospels, and in every case the breaking of the bread is referred to (Matt. 14:19, 15:36; Mark 6:41, 8:6; Luke 9:13). The eucharistic significance of the miracle is made clear through the repetition of the sequence of prayer, breaking and distributing in both the miracle and in all three synoptic accounts of the Last Supper.

The significance of the broken-ness for understanding the meaning of the death of Jesus is re-enforced in Mark by the story of the woman who broke an alabaster jar of very costly ointment and poured it upon the head of Jesus (Mark 14:3). The breaking of the jar is unique to Mark, who links the event with the burial of the body of Jesus (Mark 14:8). This may be an example of the Pauline influence upon the gospel of Mark, where as we have seen the broken-ness of the body of Jesus is a prominent theme. It may be significant that neither Matthew nor Luke says that the jar of ointment was broken (Matt. 26:7; Luke 7:38), and Luke, who brings the story further forward in his gospel, does not connect it with the burial at all. It was necessary to break the jar in order to release the fragrance of the ointment, and it was necessary to break the body in order to release the life of Jesus for the world.

Although Luke has his own interpretation of the incident in which the woman anoints Jesus with perfume he is fully aware of the significance of the breaking of the bread as a moment of revelation in which the presence of the crucified and risen Jesus is realised. It is when the

unrecognised companion breaks the bread that the disciples know him (Luke 24:30-31). Once again, the ritual sequence of blessing, breaking and distributing is referred to. The two disciples do not report to the others that Jesus had appeared to them on the road or that he had spoken with them, but only that 'he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread' (Luke 24:35). More than once in Luke's account of the early church, we are told of the breaking of bread. This was done with gladness of heart at home or from house to house (Acts 2:46); it became a regular feature of the Sunday evening meeting of the church (Acts 20:7) and in the presence of the terrified sailors during the storm, Paul 'took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat' (Acts 27:35) as an indication of his confidence in their escape.

The interpretation of broken-ness is quite different in John, where it is specifically stated that the legs of Jesus were not broken (John 19:31-33). Indeed, John regards this as a fulfillment of Psalm 34:20, 'None of his bones shall be broken' (John 19:36). Moreover, the Fourth Gospel not only makes no reference to the breaking of the bread at the Last Supper, but does not mention the bread and the wine at all. The Johannine account of the miraculous feeding does not refer to the breaking of the bread (John 6:11). We have the usual blessing, followed by the distribution, but no breaking. John's account is modeled upon the manna which came down from heaven. It was given, but not broken (John 6:48-51). When we turn to the story of the woman with the jar of ointment, we find that not only is the jar not broken; it is not even mentioned (John 12:2-8). In view of the significance which Luke attaches to the breaking of the bread, we should almost certainly regard his failure to say that the jar was broken as insignificant. After all, Luke says that there was a jar and since the woman anoints Jesus, the jar or the seal must have been broken. By way of contrast, John avoids this implication by making the jar disappear. He speaks simply of 'a pound of costly perfume' (John 12:3). Little details add up, and if we want to get a full picture of John's gospel on this point, we must turn from the concept of broken-ness, to that of wounding. Only the Fourth Gospel tells us that Jesus was wounded in the side (John 19:34). John is quite emphatic about this. 'He who saw this has testified so you also may believe. His testimony is true' (John 19: 35), and it is possible that the ambiguous words that follow call upon God to witness to its truth.

'Rich Wounds Yet Visible Above'

The hymn 'Crown Him With Many Crowns' by Matthew Bridges (1800-94) is a meditation upon Christ the King. The exaltation of the ascended Christ is referred to in the Nicene Creed with the words 'He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God. He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end'. The second verse of the hymn is:

*Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified:
no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his burning eye
at mysteries so bright.*

A later verse concludes:

*his reign shall know no end,
and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of Paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.*

From the previous century, Charles Wesley (1707-88) wrote 'Lo, he comes with clouds

descending'. One verse reads:

*The dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears;
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshipers;
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture,
gaze we on those glorious scars!*

One of the bases of the doctrine of the wounded heavenly body of Christ is Zechariah 12:10 'when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him'. It is this text that Wesley refers to in a previous verse of the famous Advent hymn.

*Every eye shall now behold him,
robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at naught and sold him,
pierced and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.*

The source of this doctrine is to be found in the gospels of Luke and John. Both tell us that the scars or wounds of Jesus were still visible in his resurrected body. In Luke we read that Jesus said to the fearful disciples, "Look at my hands and feet, see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet" (Luke 24:39-40). No doubt, the scarred hands and feet were prominent amongst the 'many convincing proofs' by means of which 'he presented himself alive to them' (Acts 1:3). The question is whether if the scars were visible in the resurrected body they were also visible in the ascended body. This question, strange as it is to most modern people, presented a gift to the devout imagination of earlier generations of Christians.^[21] After all, did not the angels say that 'This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11)? The King James Bible translates 'This same Jesus...' which leads to the thought that the identity of the returning Christ will be verifiable by the same scars, now glorious as Wesley said, and beautiful as Bridges says. This is the basis of the belief that those who pierced him will behold with horror the scars that witness to their cruelty.

The idea of the wounded resurrected body is even more vivid in the Fourth Gospel. As we have seen, only John refers to Jesus being wounded in the side, and Bridges' hymn says, 'behold his hands and side'. Only in John does Thomas demand proof of the identity of the resurrected man with the crucified man by asking to see his wounds. 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe' (John 20:25). When the resurrected Jesus appeared a week later he said to Thomas 'Put your fingers here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe' (John 20:27). The astonishing thing about these words is that they presuppose a deep wound in the side of Jesus. To put one's fingers on and to see the hands is consistent with scarring, but to put the hand into the wound suggests a wound that was still open. This is why the hymn does not speak of scars but of 'rich wounds still visible above.' We may wonder why God who had the power to raise the body of Jesus from the dead did not exercise the power to perfectly heal the body, but that is not the point. The continued visibility of the wounds was necessary in order to establish the identity of the person. True, Paul says that the body is 'perishable, but is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body' (I Cor. 15:42-44), but if we are to combine Paul with Luke and John we must add that the body of Christ is raised with imperishable scars, glorious scars, and in a state of wounded power. So we see that this biblical doctrine of perfection is that of a wounded perfection, a scarred perfection, and imperfect perfection. This is why Paul, who understood broken bodies, was so

conscious of weakness (*astheneia*: I Cor. 15:43; II Cor. 11:30; 12:5, 9ff; 13:4; Gal. 4:13). Paul also said that God's weakness is stronger than human strength (I Cor. 1:25), which could be translated 'God's inability is stronger than human ability.' and he was comforted by God who did not reply to his prayer for strength, but told him that 'power is made perfect in weakness' (II Cor. 12:9) or 'ability is made perfect in inability.'^[22]

The Heavenly Session

The doctrine of the heavenly session refers to Christ seated in glory. It is based upon such passages as Mark 16:19 'The Lord Jesus...was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God', which is a late formulation, and upon several sayings of Jesus e.g. 'But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God' (Luke 22:69). The idea is prominent in the writings of Paul; '...he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (I Cor. 15:25) and 'it is Christ Jesus, who died, ye, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us' (Rom. 8:34). From this last expression we learn that the idea is not only of sitting at the right hand of God as an exercise of authority and power, but is also a continuation of the mercy and grace of Christ on behalf of human beings. The heavenly session is also the heavenly intercession. This idea is a source of inspiration for Christian living; 'so if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' (Col. 3:1).^[23]

The idea of the heavenly intercession leads naturally to the concept of Christ as High Priest. This is a central motif in the letter to the Hebrews. As high priest, the ascended and glorified Christ represents his earthly followers, and just as a priest on earth offers sacrifices, so the great High Priest must have something to offer. '...he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood' (Heb. 9:12). Thus, '...he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (Heb. 9:24).

Although the scars and wounds of the ascended Christ are not specifically mentioned in Hebrews, the idea of the high priest presenting his blood and interceding does suggest the image. An important feature of the argument in Hebrews is that the high priest was perfect (Heb. 7:26-28). This refers, however, to the contrast between the repetition of the sacrifices offered by the earthly priests and the finality of the perfect sacrifice offered once for all (v. 28). Nevertheless, the high priest remains a man who can 'sympathize with our weaknesses' and who 'in every respect has been tested as we are' (Heb. 4:15); 'he learned obedience through what he suffered' and although he has been 'made perfect' and 'became the source of eternal salvation' (Heb. 5:8-9), he continues to present before God the evidence, so to speak, of his sufferings in the form of his blood.

Adoration of the five wounds of Jesus became a feature of mystical contemplation in the Middle Ages, and the Cult of the Wound in the Side is to be found in the writings of St. Bonaventure (c. 1217-74) and others, although it was not theologically defined until the 18th century.^[24] The stigmata, first received by St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) were always ambiguous in that it is unclear whether these replications of the five wounds were induced through meditation upon the crucifixion or upon the wounds of Christ the High Priest. This ambiguity became a matter of controversy with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century.

The question was whether the eucharist reproduced the actual body and blood of Christ. The reformers, in opposing transubstantiation insisted that the real presence of the body of Christ could not be on earth, because it was already in heaven, at the right hand of God.^[25] Moreover, it was argued that the sacrifice of Christ's death could not be repeated Sunday by Sunday since it had been offered by Christ once for all. This raised the question whether, when Christ showed himself to the

Father, interceding for us, he was merely reminding the Father of the merits of his past sacrifice, or whether he was always engaged in a perpetual self-sacrifice.^[26] One point of view, which is significant for a theology of disability, was that it was as a human being that Christ interceded before God. Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. AD 350-428) had taught that our human nature is already in heaven where Jesus Christ in the body which he received from the Virgin Mary, which was crucified, risen and ascended, represents us before God. Thus, the exultation of Christ is the exultation of the human.^[27] Similarly, Jerome (c. AD 342-420) taught that 'Christ is said to intercede because He ever exhibits to the Father the manhood, which He took upon Him, as a pledge for us, and offers it, as the true and eternal High Priest.'^[28] When the reformers of the sixteenth century sought to emphasise the transcendence of God by insisting that the body of Jesus Christ could not be on the altar because it was in Heaven, it became natural to emphasise that the body of Christ still carried the marks of suffering. This emphasis entered into Protestant evangelical mysticism through Zinzendorf (1700-60) and his devotions to the wounds of Christ. From here it passed into the hymns of Charles Wesley as referred to above.

As far as we are concerned, these controversies are long since dead, but a significant point remains, and one which is hardly ever commented on in the interests of a theology of disability; the Man who stands at God's right hand is imperfect. The broken body on earth corresponds to the broken body in heaven. Moreover, the broken body on earth is to be found not only in the eucharist, or the Lord's Supper, but also in the church, which is the broken body of Christ, and in the broken body of suffering humanity. When people are hungry or thirsty, or naked, or sick, or in prison, it is Christ who suffers these things, and because only a body can suffer thirst, hunger, nakedness, illness and imprisonment, it is not the Spirit but the body of Christ that suffers (Matt. 25:31-46).

We have found that in addition to its mythological history of a perfection lost and to be regained, the Christian faith also expresses a profound and beautiful theology of broken-ness.^[29] Perhaps we could even say that a fundamental distinction can be made between churches and individual Christians: the theology of power, supremacy, uniqueness and prosperity is one form taken by the Christian faith today, and the theology of broken-ness is its principal alternative. The theology of broken-ness offers the church a way of replacing the oppressive monolith of an unambiguous perfection with the rich and varied ambiguity of many forms of human broken-ness.

Conclusions: Disability and the Mission of the Church

We have seen that when we start our thinking from the body of Christ, rather than from the image of God, we discover a theology of disability which is supported by various elements within the Christian faith. These include the implications of the fraction i.e. the breaking of the bread by the priest at the eucharist and the scarred and wounded body of Christ the King. The first of these symbols reminds us that broken-ness lies at the heart of the paschal mystery and that the church is united through broken-ness. The second symbol reminds us that the Christian mythology, while it converges upon the perfection of a liberated cosmos, does not conform to the images of perfection which are found in our present culture, but witnesses to a range of patterns of perfection. At this point we encounter the Christian paradox of strength through weakness and life through death. The perfection of God is a perfection of vulnerability and of openness to pain. Part of the mission of the church is to bear witness to the God of life by accepting many forms of human life and sharing in human vulnerability and pain. In this respect, part of the mission of disabled people is to become apostles of inclusion, witnesses of vulnerability and partners in pain.

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- [1] I have explored the implications of the idea of the perfect human face and having visual access to the face in 'Blindness and the Face of God' in Hans-Georg Ziebertz et al (eds) *The Human Image of God*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, pp. 215-229.
- [2] Anthony Stevens and John Price *Evolutionary Psychiatry: A New Beginning*, London, Routledge, 2000.
- [3] *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* [U.N. Decade of Disabled Persons 1982-1992], New York, United Nations, 1983, l.c. 6-7.
- [4] Susan Wendall *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.14.
- [5] Mark Johnson *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, London, University of Chicago Press, 1987 and Mark Johnson and George Lakoff (eds) *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York, Basic Books, 1999.
- [6] Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception*, London, Routledge, 1992.
- [7] I have explored the idea of blindness as being a more or less distinct world of human experience in 'Blindness and the Face...', 'Open Letter from a Blind Disciple to a Sighted Saviour', in Martin O'Kane (ed.) *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* [Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 313] Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2002, pp. 154-177 and especially in 'Spirituality of Disability: The Christian Tradition as Both Problem and Potential', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol 16 no.2 Autumn 2003, in press.
- [8] Although certainly not a theological author, Nancy Hartsock should be mentioned as her work is of considerable significance in understanding capitalist and feminist epistemologies as springing from relationships of power in society. Nancy C. M. Hartsock *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, London, Longman, 1983, pp.231ff and *passim*
- [9] James B. Nelson *Body Theology*, Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.
- [10] Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart *Introducing Body Theology* [Introductions in Feminist Theology] Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.
- [11] James B. Nelson *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*, London, SPCK, 1979.
- [12] For example, David Pailin offers a theology of disability based upon process philosophy. David A. Pailin *A Gentle Touch: From a Theology of Handicap to a Theology of Human Being*, London, SPCK, 1992.
- [13] For example, 'Redeemed Bodies, Fullness of Life', by Barbara B. Patterson in Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers (eds) *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1998, Chap. 6, pp.123ff is mainly concerned with the nature of Christ's resurrected body. Some contributions to theology of disability emphasise the character and consequences of exclusion: Don E. Saliers 'Toward a Spirituality of Inclusiveness' and Jürgen Moltmann 'Liberate Yourselves by Accepting One Another', in Eiesland and Saliers (eds.) *Human Disability...*, Chaps. 1 & 5. Others derive inspiration from theology of liberation: Nancy L. Eiesland *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994.
- [14] John M. Hull *In The Beginning There Was Darkness*, London, SCM, 2001; Harrisburg, PA, Trinity Press International, 2002.
- [15] Anecdotes from several countries were reported by members of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches meeting in Cartigny, Switzerland, from 1st – 5th October, 2001.
- [16] This view of the Christian myth was a characteristic of the federal theology which by 1600 had become the main type of Reformed theology in western Europe. David A. Weir *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, especially p. 62ff.
- [17] Peter L. Berger *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, London, Collins, 1980.
- [18] Robert N. Bellah *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*, London, Harper & Row, 1970, Chap. 2 'Religious Evolution'.
- [19] Hull *In The Beginning...*, pp. 52-58.
- [20] I am grateful to Professor Troels Engberg-Pedersen of the University of Copenhagen for sending me a copy of his paper 'Body Language in Paul' which he presented to the British New Testament Conference, in Manchester on 6-8 September 2001.
- [21] The doctrine of the scarred resurrected body in the early Christian centuries is discussed by Barbara Patterson 'Redeemed Bodies'..., p. 126.
- [22] I am grateful to Simon Hone 'Those Who are Blind: Some New Testament Uses of Impairment, Inability and Paradox', in Eiesland and Saliers (eds) *Human Disability...*, Chap. 4, p. 88ff, for these insights.

- [23] Arthur J. Tait *The Heavenly Session of Our Lord*, London, Robert Scott, 1912.
- [24] C. J. Walsh, art. 'Sacred Heart', in J. G. Davies (ed.) *A New Dictionary of Liturgy & Worship*, London, SCM Press, 1986, p. 473.
- [25] Christopher Elwood *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist, and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth Century France*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 36ff.
- [26] Tait *The Heavenly Session...*, pp.105-148.
- [27] Tait *The Heavenly Session...*, p.154.
- [28] Tait *Heavenly Session...*, p.157.
- [29] This is developed by Jean Vanier in his theology undergirding the L'Arch communities of disabled people. Jean Vanier *The Broken Body*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998.

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