

from matter
to Spirit

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THE BODY DIVINE

Centuries ago, in what has since been regarded as the most widely quoted speech ever given, Jesus of Nazareth encouraged his listeners to take no thought for the body.¹ Today, our body-conscious culture defines physical makeup as the very locus of identity, requiring us to care for, display, observe, and obey it. As a thriving, worldwide industry, body care—whether medical or image enhancing—trains humanity's focus on the body's form and function. Given that our culture seems to worship the body, could Jesus' words seem unrealistic, or even dangerous, to contemporary thought?

It helps to consider the context in which Jesus spoke. In what we now call the Sermon on the Mount, he was actually asking members of his audience to consider their priorities. As keynote to his ministry's message and life example, Jesus' sermon encouraged listeners, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God"² and, as a consequence, their human needs would be met. The natural result of seeking God's kingdom in this way is based on the coincidence, or spiritual agreement, between the divine and the human. It's actually an awakening process, one that spiritually adjusts human thought and then experience, bringing both into alignment with divine facts. As Jesus demonstrated in his healing ministry, holding what is spiritually true in thought acts as a law to human experience, and that law, in agreement with divine reality, is evidenced in healing. In fact, this concept of the coincidence of the divine with the human underlies all spiritual healing.

Can this approach be used today in caring for the body? Jesus' method, successfully practiced for several centuries, continues to appeal to contemporary thought, healing thousands of people around the globe who find material approaches less effective than spiritual methods. Too, spiritualizing the concept of body is attractive to people who simply wish to live a life that demonstrates more dominion over the inevitable limitations of matter-based strategies. Now, as in Jesus' time, the success of this approach rests in spiritually regarding the body as the coincidence of the divine with the human.

This reality is not at all based in the corporeal realm. The divine fact regarding the body is not achieved by simply trying to envision the human body more spiritually. Spirit, God, does not use material reasoning to give itself definition. In fact, we might say just the opposite is true. The human concept is really but an ignorant attempt to copy the divine. By trying to interpret the divine fact through its own material or physical point of view, the human concept of the body is merely imitative, pointing thought to the spiritually divine body created by God.

This spiritual body is not an ethereal version of the physical one, but is rather a body of ideas, and one that is only understood mentally. God, divine Mind, creates ideas and, because these ideas manifest the nature of their source, the substance of reality consists of the qualities and attributes of Mind. These ideas evidence not only the nature of God, but the activity of God, as well. Because this is true, the character of the genuine "body" can't be discerned through matter. Where human thought looks for physical function in the body, a divine perspective of body looks at spiritual activity.

For instance, to physical sense, faculties such as sight, hearing, intellect, memory, and so forth, are the result of complex material organisms. Spiritual sense, reasoning through the perspective of divine Mind, Spirit, views these same faculties as the divine activity of discernment, understanding, comprehension, and retention. These are mental endowments from the one Mind, God, and exist as the activity of this Mind. As long as Mind, God, remains and gives expression to itself, these spiritual faculties will remain evident in our lives. One of the

essential elements in the expression of healthy faculties, or any other activity of the body, is the recognition that their manifestation is the responsibility of Spirit, not the result of mere human effort.

In discussing the methods of spiritual development, Mary Baker Eddy—arguably one of the most prolific spiritual healers of modern times—wrote in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*: “Take possession of your body, and govern its feeling and action. . . . God has made man capable of this, and nothing can vitiate the ability and power divinely bestowed on man.”¹ To take possession of the body means to take responsibility for it in exercising our divine authority to think accurately about it from a spiritual standpoint. It is not enough to simply put the body out of thought, although it is helpful not to dwell on it by measuring, in one form or another, every physical effect it displays. But to “take thought” of the body in Jesus’ way is to seek the spiritual truth of it, locating the body where it actually exists, in God’s kingdom.

Jesus’ healings, and the millions that have come as a result of his example, show that rising to a higher standpoint of thought and seeing the body as the temple of God that Paul refers to in his first letter to the Corinthians,⁴ is the most effective way of caring for it. Truthfully, it is the only way one gains complete mastery of the body. To see body as the functioning of divine activity, manifesting the presence of God in strength, balance, proportion, purity, wisdom, and so forth, is to take possession of it and govern its feeling and action.

Paul continues with his admonition in First Corinthians to “glorify God in your body.”⁵ We can’t do that if we believe that a physical or corporeal body is the manifestation of God. But we can glorify God by understanding body as divine ideas and activity. This results in the body’s normal and natural functioning, which comes as we keep thought focused on evidencing the glory of God’s nature and character.

I have seen sight restored in an individual who made

spiritual discernment, or seeing spiritually, his goal. Viewing others the way God sees them and searching circumstances for the spiritual good in them, restored material vision. I’ve also witnessed hearing restored when the person conscientiously listened more carefully to the messages of Spirit and followed those directives, rather than taking a humanly willful approach. I’ve seen paralysis healed when the patient resolved to let her muscles be the “thought-forces”⁶ from divine Mind, rather than dwelling on them as material entities. In fact, every element of the body, when restored to its rightful identity as a divine idea created to glorify God, can return to its normal activity.

Those convinced that the body is a material machine, best cared for through material substances and means, will likely find this concept of body improbable. This is the proverbial line drawn in the sand, the very conflict that the authors of the Bible realized centuries ago: The flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Christian Science has called human thought to continue this warfare until we understand existence in terms of Spirit’s centrality, until we uncover the unbroken relationship of the divine with the human.

Ultimately this coincidence must dawn on human thought so that it accepts it “as divinity embracing humanity in Life and its demonstration,—reducing to human perception and understanding the Life which is God. In divine revelation, material and corporeal selfhood disappear, and the spiritual idea is understood.”⁷ TCSJ

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¹ See Matt. 6:25. ² Matt. 6:33. ³ *Science and Health*, p. 393. ⁴ See I Cor. 6:19. ⁵ I Cor. 6:20. ⁶ *Science and Health*, p. 199. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 561.