

Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

In order to provide a corrective to hundreds of years of biblical interpretation that has de-valued the body, Schroer and Staubli argue that in the Bible, the body is more comparable to a temple than a prison. They suggest that an appreciation of the biblical body as a temple will lead to greater “respect” for human bodies (xiii), particularly those that have been marginalized and minimized in Christian traditions.

In the introduction, Schroer and Staubli begin to establish points of continuity and discontinuity between ancient and modern conceptions of—and assumptions about—the body. They briefly substantiate the claim that readings of the Bible that have been influenced by Platonism and Neoplatonism, which view the soul as superior to the body, can be correlated with historical instances of bodily abuse and the exploitation of nature. To buttress their assertion that a theology that both values the body *and* attends to the biblical text is possible and promising, Schroer and Staubli engage the work of Jewish philosophers (Rosenzweig, Levinas) and feminist (Gebara), postcolonial (Fanon), and liberation (Boff) theologians.

After interacting with previous work on biblical anthropology by Wolff and Barr, Schroer and Staubli go on to construct their own argument about how people in the ancient Near East understood themselves to be embodied selves. They begin by contrasting Hellenistic conceptions of the body, which privilege the body’s form and appearance, with ancient Near Eastern views of bodies, which are “stereometric” and as such prioritize relationality and movement. The authors present biblical as well as iconographic evidence to support their over-arching argument that men and women encounter God and one another most fully in and through their physicality.

**Day Bath**  
by Debra Spencer

*for my son*

Last night I walked him back and forth,  
his small head heavy against my chest,  
round eyes watching me in the dark,  
his body a sandbag in my arms.  
I longed for sleep but couldn't bear his crying  
so bore him back and forth until the sun rose  
and he slept. Now the doors are open,  
noon sunlight coming in,  
and I can see fuchsias opening.  
Now we bathe. I hold him, the soap  
makes our skins glide past each other.  
I lay him wet on my thighs, his head on my knees,  
his feet dancing against my chest,  
and I rinse him, pouring water  
from my cupped hand.  
No matter how I feel, he's the same,  
eyes expectant, mouth ready,  
with his fat legs and arms,  
his belly, his small solid back.  
Last night I wanted nothing more  
than to get him out of my arms.  
Today he fits neatly  
along the hollow my thighs make,  
and with his fragrant skin against mine  
I feel brash, like a sunflower.

Debra Spencer. "Day Bath" in *Pomegranate*. (Santa Cruz, CA: Hummingbird Press, 2004).

I chose this poem to respond to the reading for a number of reasons. As I thought about the problem of the "spiritualizing" of theological anthropology that the authors describe, the lack of emphasis on the body in conceptions of what it means to be ultimately human in the history of biblical interpretation, I went looking for a poem that makes meaning of human experience through the physicality of the body. This poem reminded me of how "in my body" I felt as a mother of young children, through processes of pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and the physical demands of care on a day to

day basis. My experience as a young mother in moments like the poet describes stood out in contrast to the way I normally encountered myself as a graduate theological student, where I considered myself primarily in terms of mind and spirit. The poem also picks up on the authors' emphasis on the body in relation to other bodies, especially those in need of care, the emphasis on relationality rather than form as key to beauty, and the erotic connection between bodies as key elements of the biblical tradition on body. Finally, the way the author characterizes the baby as parts (eyes, mouth, fat legs and arms, belly, solid back) reminds me of poetic biblical texts from the Psalms and elsewhere where people are characterized as their parts in action, as the authors describe in the section "‘My body dwells securely.’ Physical prayers of physical people" (28-29).