

Body Parts: A Theological Anthropology. By Michelle Voss Roberts. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017. xvii + 181 pages. \$29.00 (paper).

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Despite comparative theology being well into its second generation, some may still perceive it to be a niche, perhaps even a superfluous method. *Body Parts* ought to shatter that misperception. In it, Voss Roberts constructs a theological anthropology centered on the questions “What is the image of God in humanity?” and “How have existing theological anthropologies (substance, functional, and relational models) excluded persons from that image?” (xxiii). Drawing upon a rich range of theological voices, her response is interdisciplinary and interreligious. As such, it provides not only a more holistic and inclusive conception of the *imago Dei*, but also a method attentive to the problems and attuned to the possibilities for theology today.

The comparative catalyst for her construction is Abhinavagupta (c. 950–1025 CE) and his nondual Saivism. Its frame is found in this philosophy’s thirty-six *tattvas* (“body parts”), which range from the most subtle—pure, undifferentiated consciousness—to the most gross—the element earth. The chapters follow Abhinavagupta’s grouping of these body parts into what Voss Roberts names the conscious, limited, subjective, engaged, and elemental bodies. Reflecting upon and being attentive to these five bodies along the subtle/gross spectrum help one to rethink various dualities that operate in theological anthropology: mind and body, spirit and matter, subject and object, transcendent and immanent. Abhinavagupta’s *advaita*—“non-difference in difference according to the principle of reflection” (xxxviii)—permits a more encompassing image that need not be reduced to an either/or but, instead, can support a both/and.

Individually, each of these bodies provides points for comparative reflection. Collectively, they reframe the reflection metaphor from a single-surface mirror to a multifaceted jewel. Here the image of God in humanity is not reduced to one particular and particularly “human” attribute, but rather incorporates an array of dimensions that shoot through the depth and breadth of the human person. The imaging of God goes all the way down, or less hierarchically, emanates all the way out. The kernel of consciousness as well as the quark spinning subatomically reflect God’s grandeur.

No Christian anthropology would be complete without a treatment of sin. Most of this conversation is situated in the section on the limited body (the only body not limited to a single chapter). Voss Roberts critically makes use of Reinhold Niebuhr’s anthropology, in which the occasion for sin lies between humanity’s finitude and its freedom. Limitations in power, knowledge, satisfaction, time, and space are not evil; they are not punishments.

Rather, connecting with theologies of disability, here particularly that of Deborah Creamer, the author presents sin as founded in the rejection or exaggeration of these limits. Original sin is then understood as the “conditions within which humans inevitably overreach their limits or fail to grasp the graced nature of finite existence” (68–69). Because sin is an epistemological problem—with painful, practical ramifications—some critics might question the place of grace in this anthropology. Within this system, one finds that grace itself makes up the warp and woof of creation, working in and through all things rather than outside and upon.

Each chapter concludes with practices designed to help one become attentive to the corresponding body and the ways in which its parts image God. Reading and reasoning are necessary but rarely sufficient for realization. These practices aim to cultivate a “habitual awareness of God in all things” (xlv) and a “holistic and fully embodied knowledge that each part reflects the divine image” (xlv). They entail becoming attuned to the subtlest movements of consciousness as well as a sacramental awareness of the most elemental components of creation. Likewise, they call one to be attentive to that which might be observed most immediately and conditioned most thoroughly: the body that images God, not despite, but because of one’s limitations.

Scholars will benefit from the many theologies brought together here. Cutting-edge and contextual theologies convene and converse critically and constructively with “classic” anthropologies while each footnote beats a path to another corpus for theological reflection. Fitting for both an undergraduate seminar or a graduate/seminary setting, *Body Parts* constructs an anthropology capable of meeting the questions and concerns of the present by employing a method that is as equally inclusive and holistic as its vision for the image of God in humanity.

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Theology and Religion: Why It Matters. By Graham Ward. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. ix + 128 pages. \$12.25 (paper).

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In this book Graham Ward sets himself the challenging task of articulating the importance of theology and religion in a short introduction aimed at the educated reader. Given the impossibly wide potential scope of such a project, Ward situates the work against contemporary challenges—namely, secularism, scientific discoveries, and climate change. He thus sets out to show