

Book Review

John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Washington: Lexham Press, 2021), xvi + 235 pp. \$27.99

Reviewed by Patrick Steckbeck

KLEINIG'S AIM IN *WONDERFULLY MADE* is to paint a positive vision of the body, not primarily to critique various issues related to the body with which he disagrees. His book is relatively short "pastoral-theological" meditation written from, in his words, a "classical Lutheran" perspective. What he means by classical Lutheran is synonymous with "confessional Lutheran," where the Book of Concord is viewed as an accurate interpretation and exposition of the inspired and infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (16-18). Throughout the book, Kleinig is faithful to this vision; his book evidences a mind thoroughly versed in the Scriptures, and his command of the epistle to the Hebrews is especially notable. He also weaves quotations from Luther and the Lutheran confessions throughout the work as a helpful summary of what the Scriptures teach on the body as applied to contemporary concerns. He does this all while incorporating authors outside the Lutheran tradition when helpful, notably C.S. Lewis.

Regarding its form, the depth of his thought enhances the clarity of presentation through an organized exposition of various topics related to the body, expressed in a characteristically pastoral tone. His meaning is discernible via his use of logically ordered lists and his avoidance of overuse of technical terminology. Moreover, the book generally resonates with an aesthetic sense thanks to his ability to paint beautiful pictures by drawing on Scriptural images (notably, the Song of Songs in chapter 5, "The Sexual Body"). In doing so, he creates a sense of connection and engagement with the reader. His pastoral voice resonates throughout. Regarding its content, the book deals with multiple topics: the body in creation, the body in redemption, the spiritual body Christians are promised, the sexual body, the spousal body, and the living body. Throughout these chapters, a recurring theme and its implications surface multiple times. *Christians are united to the physical body of Jesus Christ*. He states, "How then, in light of Christ's redemption of our bodies, does God the Father regard our bodies? ... He regards them as holy, just as holy as the human body of Jesus..." (92).

This reviewer sees one section of Kleinig's book as problematic from the perspective of his commitments to the Scriptures and Lutheran confessions. On pages 203-210, he engages the issue of homosexuality. There is much good in this section,

yet as to same-sex attraction, he writes, “we should not condemn people for . . . their physical attraction to people of the same sex. That would only drive them to despair at their seemingly hopeless condition or to reject God’s word. Rather, our focus should be on the salvation of their souls by repentance for their sexual sins and the cleansing of their conscience through the blood of Jesus. We are all sinners who need to be pardoned for sin” (204). This section raises some questions. Does he believe that same-sex attraction is truly sinful? Or does he only believe that the act of homosexuality is sinful? If he does believe same-sex attraction is sinful, doesn’t that mean that Christians should condemn it as an application of the ministry of the Law for the sake of repentance? While the gentleness in the pastoral approach toward the broken is commendable in this section, one wonders what Kleinig thinks about the accusatory use of the Law regarding cases of same-sex attraction among those who do not believe they are in sin. Accurately answering these questions is important because it applies to who is and is not condemned by God’s law. In this section on homosexual acts, Kleinig also asserts that God “...judges all men alike in their sexual misbehavior without regarding one kind of it as more sinful than another” (209). Considering Kleinig’s commitments, this assertion raises questions in light of biblical texts that discuss the inequality of sins (John 19:11; Ezekiel 8:15) and the seriousness of homosexuality in particular (Leviticus 18:22, 1 Corinthians 6:9, and Romans 1:18-32). While Kleinig’s pastoral concern that Christians do not self-righteously stand over their sexually sinful neighbors is commendable, this should not undermine the points of God’s Word that distinguish between sins; failing to do so will lead to a lack of gratitude for the Gospel among those who have sinned grossly in a sexual manner. “Those who are forgiven much, love much” (Luke 7:47; the woman in Luke 7 is likely sinning via sexual immorality). If all sin is equal, you can’t have “forgiven much.”

One of the glories of Kleinig’s book, which sets it apart from other works on the Theology of the Body, is its incorporation of the Lutheran doctrine of imputation with regard to Christ’s body and our bodies. For Kleinig, when God sees our bodies, he sees the body of Christ. In his chapter, “The Redeemed Body,” he thoroughly diagnoses an illness of the modern age – most people do not like their bodies. In his words, “All too often, people are dissatisfied with their bodies because they are dissatisfied with themselves” (60). Aesthetic transformation and pop psychology are not enough to cover our shame. Sinners stand in need of the body of Christ. Thankfully, Jesus redeems the body. Through his incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and ongoing intercession, Jesus saves our bodies by uniting them with his body. Through the Word, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and our communal life, God cares for us bodily. How does God, in Christ, regard our bodies? “He regards them as holy, just as holy as the human body of Jesus, for he does not consider us apart from Jesus, nor does he consider Jesus as our head apart from us” (92).

As a student of the Lutheran confessions, Kleinig is better able to incorporate this emphasis on imputation into his book than other writers.

Evaluation

KLEINIG ACCOMPLISHES WHAT HE SETS out to achieve. He paints a positive vision of the body from a classical Lutheran perspective. His book serves as a valuable resource for catechumens, laypeople, pastors, and academics seeking a meditative respite from our excessively hostile and contentious culture regarding issues related to the body. At the same time, in the view of this reviewer, his section on homosexuality should be read critically if one accepts the presuppositions about the Bible and the Lutheran confessions stated at the beginning of the book. His section on the holiness of Christ's body being "imputed" to us by God is a wonderful section that sets his book apart from others in the same category.

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