

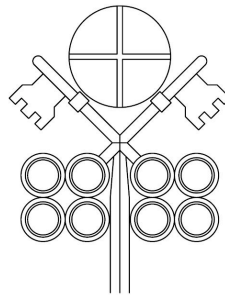
You are a body:  
not a no-body,  
nor just any-body,  
but some-body.

The Body is the dwelling place  
of the whole-making Spirit.

(Jim Cotter)

# MY BODY AND PRAYER

by the Rev'd David Runcorn



You knit me together  
mother's womb. I praise  
you for I am fearfully  
wonderfully made'.

Psalm 139

Sit still. Hands together. Eyes closed', was the Sunday school ritual. I learned at a very early age that my body was a distraction when God was concerned. It needed firm handling if 'praying' was going to happen properly.

## Getting in touch – body and spirit

The body as where we start from. This is such an obvious but neglected observation. And life continues in the body. Our body is something we never grow out. Life is inescapably physical. The business of living involves the whole of us. Did you know, for example, that only 7% of human communication is verbal?

## Pain, healing and embodiment:

We learn from people who have suffered particular abuse, violence that our relationship to our bodies is central to who we are and to our search for wholeness. Helen Bamber, who has spent a lifetime working with victims of torture comments that for such people, 'cruelty is, above all, an experience of the human body. To live in such a body – one that had been starved, beaten, marked for death – must have been to experience a sharply heightened awareness of the physical self, and to resent any disparagement of it.' Central to her work of rehabilitation and healing is a reclaiming of "the good body" and relearning a way of respecting the body and the self with it. The same truth is witnessed in the effectiveness of 'body positive' therapies among people with illnesses that carry particular stigma such as HIV.

## Truth, fantasy and reconciliation

The search for embodied spirituality must also find a way of responding to the relentless idealising of the human body in contemporary culture. This means that relating to our physical being is a continuous loving act of reconciliation and acceptance of ourselves - and others. It means letting go of unrealistic hopes.

Our bodies are mortal. They have strengths and weaknesses. They are frail and are not made to last. They can let us down - and we let them down. Nor did we choose them actually. They are a given. In all this a Christian community that is creative in seeking holistic expressions of prayer and worship will be both a healing and subversive gift to the idolatry and cruelty of cultural pressures.

### **Living and praying in the flesh - some responses**

Some of the exercises that follow may seem strange and embarrassing for some of you, but the process may bring surprising insights and rewards if you take the risk! There's no need to try them all - just have a look to see what might suit and help you.

### Listening to our bodies

Ask yourself: When am I most alive in my body?

When do I most struggle in my body?

### Talking to our bodies

For good or ill our life story is mapped on our bodies in some way or other. Our flesh absorbs our joys and our stresses - aches, pains, hopes and fears.

Write an imaginary conversation with parts of your body. These may be parts that have carried particular burdens for you in your journey, or brought special joys to it. There may bring a realisation of ways in which we have been careless about our bodies, or treated them badly. We may need to say sorry.

Which part of your body would you want to talk to?

What do you want say?

What might that part of your body say to you?

What would you like that part of your body to say to you?

### Being at home with our bodies.

For many reasons it is very easy to live in alienation from our physical nature. It may help to acknowledge the different parts of our body in turn. For some of us it may be healing to seek a place of personal privacy and to lie or sit naked whilst doing this.

Taking each part of the body in turn,  
name it, greet it, pray for it and bless it.

'God be in my .....

Another way of expressing this is in the bath or the shower where the physical sensation of being warmly soaked or poured over can be vivid image of the reality of God's love for us in our flesh – the love that surrounds us and pours itself out over us

### Praying with our bodies.

On your own or in a group pray the Lord's Prayer without words – using movement, mime or any actions you choose.

### Embodying the Word

I once attended a most unusual bible study. As the publicity said 'wear loose clothing' it was obvious we were in for something different. The person leading it was a man who believed that the split between body and spirit in Western Christianity carried such profound and damaging consequences that he would not now lead a bible study that did not include physical movement. For forty minutes we were encouraged to move around the room in whatever way we chose, to a background of music and scripture reading. 'And the word became flesh and dwelt among us'. Try it!

### **A final reflection**

Love your body.