Book Reviews

Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World

Gregg R. Allison, Baker, 2021.
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"Embodiment is the proper state of human existence," according to Gregg Allison, author of *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (p. 14). His purpose is to unpack an understanding of what is meant by the term and to develop a "theology of human embodiment" (p. 15). The idea of embodiment is under attack in our society. On the one hand, modern variations of Gnosticism teach that the body is inherently evil and merely an instrument for our use, justifying such moral controversies as seen in sexual dysphoria and transgenderism. On the other hand, some elevate their bodies to an object of worship, striving for perfection through physical exercise and cosmetic procedures to enhance their appearance, even when the end goal is unclear. Allison brings clarity to embodiment and what it means for how we should live out our lives amongst the mixed signals of the world.

The book's opening chapter explores a biblical perspective on our physical bodies, contrasting with ideas promoted by Gnosticism and neo-Gnosticism. The Bible shows that humanity is an embodied existence where God designed us as divine image bearers. Allison argues that Jesus Christ is embodied and had a bodily resurrection as proof that bodies are not inherently evil. He also considers the human purpose, as created by God for human flourishing, to be procreation and vocation, with the cultural mandate as part of embodiment.

With this in mind, the author focuses his exploration of embodiment on a theological examination, concluding each discussion point with thoughts on application. He starts with what it means to have a gendered body, arguing that gender is not a social construct that can be dismantled, since it is part of our genetic makeup. Allison then discusses our individuality as each person uniquely created by God, and considers that part of our social makeup is our desire and capacity for human relationships. In his discussion on relationships, he pays particular attention to relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ and how this should always influence how we relate. He then examines sexual relationships as unique, with the understanding that God designed sexual activity exclusively for the covenantal relationship between a husband and wife that is monogamous and unbreakable. He also shows how sexual sins are contrary to God's created sociality.

Allison devotes a chapter to Jesus Christ as an embodied human being and how all the previously addressed aspects apply to him. He moves from there to show how Scripture describes the sanctified body and how it is changed by sanctification. He then, in turn, examines bodily discipline such as exercise, nutrition, and worship. He concludes the book by discussing clothing, suffering and healing, death, and the future body.

Jeffrey Betcher, "Review of Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World, by Gregg Allison," *Ethics & Medicine* 38, no. 1–2 (2022): 87–88.

Allison commendably covers many aspects of embodiment relevant to everyday life in a fallen world. Each chapter concludes with applications for the element of embodiment examined. Herein is a word of caution: when it comes to areas of medicine, his comments are not backed up with references, bringing their validity into question. For example, many comments about nutrition and exercise lack detailed references.

This concern is especially evident in the section "The Nature of (Physical) Death" (p. 236), where he devotes one paragraph to the subject of brain death. He quotes from the Uniform Determination Act that "whole brain death means either irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem" (p. 237), but fails to interpret the context of the paragraph quoted. The correct understanding is that death can be declared in one of two ways: either by the irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory function (somatic death) or the irreversible cessation of all the functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem (whole brain death). The author further incorrectly states that "A more recent measure focuses on *higher brain death* or *neocortical death*, which is the loss of capacity for consciousness (self-awareness), social interchange, and financial contribution" (p. 237). The concept of higher brain death is not new. While correctly describing the two phenomena, he fails to recognize that these are mutually exclusive views on brain death. Most jurisdictions do not recognize neocortical brain death as a terminal event in the same way as whole-brain death. This distinction is critical in organ donation, where the donor has undergone a declaration of death by neurologic criteria.

Allison's book briefly introduces embodiment as a concept, with some interesting points of application along the way. He spends very little time considering the relationship between the body and soul, focusing instead on what it means for us to have a body. Readers should use *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* as a springboard for further investigation.

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