Whether We Sit Down Or Rise Up:
Prayer Posture and Spiritual Direction

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Lord, thou has examined me and knowest me.
Thou knowest all, whether I sit down or rise up;
Thou knowest me through and through:
my body is no mystery to thee,
how I was secretly kneaded into shape
and patterned in the depths of the earth.
Thou didst see my limbs unformed in the womb,
and in thy book they are all recorded;
day by day they were fashioned,
not one of them late in growing.
Examine me, O God, and know my thoughts;
test me, and understand my misgivings.
Watch lest I follow any path that grieves thee;
guide me in the ancient ways.

Psalm 139, *passim*[*]

[*] *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, ed. Samuel Sandmel, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

ABSTRACT

The practice of spiritual direction is often described as a kind of conversation; a conversation in which two or more people come together to reflect on the Christian life, and especially, to discuss the life of prayer. While this conversation includes both words and silence, spiritual direction also includes the body and should include reflection upon how the body is used in prayer.

When the body is brought into discussions of spiritual development and care, often this is done by borrowing practices and postures from outside the Christian tradition. Yoga, Tai Chi, and other schools of practice can certainly enhance the body's disposition for prayer, yet it seems unfortunate that Christians do not explore more deeply the postures and practices of their own tradition.

This paper attempts to bring together a variety of Christian prayer postures and suggest ways in which postures can deepen the life of prayer and enrich the practice of spiritual direction. After a brief section on biblical postures, considerable space will be given for a discussion of postures which developed in the fourth century. An imporant section for individual prayer follows with the illustrated prayer manuals of St. Dominic and Peter the Chanter of Paris. Next is discussed the work of Herbert Slade and Anthony de Mello. After two short sections on women's postures for prayer and the necessity of studying historical prayer forms, the paper concludes with practical suggestions for incorporating posture into individual, group and large group spiritual direction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

One morning in worship I used the "Time with the Children" to explore some different postures for prayer. First we put our hands together, bowed our heads and prayed "old fashioned-style." Then we threw back our heads, opened our eyes and looked straight above as we spoke with God, fully expecting God to answer. We tried crossing our arms, hugging ourselves, and recalling the symbolism of the Lenten pretzel, and the legend which explains that the shape of the pretzel represents two little arms, crossed in prayer. After it all, one of the children looked up at me and said in a too-loud-for-church voice: "Hey, that was fun. We should do that more."

Indeed. It was fun, and we should do it more. The postures we form as we pray can bring our bodies and our spirits into a new integration. By intentionally posturing our prayer, healing and wholeness can be more deeply welcomed. By posturing our prayer, we learn to pray more fully.

This paper is written with gratitude to the Presbyterian Churches in
Havre de Grace, Maryland and Lyndhurst, New Jersey;
whose children have prayed like pretzels
and whose adults have encouraged their pastor
to pray more fully and more constantly.

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The writer of Psalm 139 celebrates the human body. It is a gift from God and it is proclaimed by God to be good. There is a close connection between the words of the psalm and the awareness the psalmist has of his or her body. The words not only are written by the body as the hand moves across the page; but at a deeper level, the words of Psalm 139 come from the body. From the body itself the images erupt, the words are awakened and the prayer is prayed.

That a psalm is inspired by the human body should not surprise those who call themselves Christians, since it is we who proclaim a God become incarnate. "The word was made flesh," says St. John and our theology is built around this belief as we meet the risen Christ in word and sacrament. Yet, the physicality of Christ can be easily lost, as can be our own awareness of our bodies when we worship or pray. Over the last several decades much has been written about this loss or devaluation of the human body. Even though the Church has continued to envision itself as "Christ's body," it has given insufficient attention to the challenge behind this phrase. We have forgotten the words of St. Paul when he urges, "Now *you* are the body of Christ..."(1 Corinthians. 12:27)[1]

One result of not taking the body seriously has been the tendency to "live in the head." Most practice of Christian faith centers upon words, thoughts, things spoken or sung with the mouth, things seen with the eyes or heard with the ears. Anthony de Mello

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all biblical quotations refer to *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, New York: American Bible Soceity, 1989.

identified part of the problem with religious people who live too much "in their heads" in the following words from the 1970's:

> As a result [of living too much in the head, Christians] rarely live in the present. They are almost always in the past or in the future. In the past, regretting past mistakes, feeling guilty about past sins, gloating over past achievements, resenting past injuries caused them by other people. Or in the future, dreading possible calamities or unpleasantness, anticipating future joys, dreaming of future events.[2]

A Christianity which lives too much in its head will hold on to the past or fixate on the future, but ignore the reality of the present.

Some progress is being made to bring the body more fully into Christian prayer and practice. There are attempts to restore the whole body's place in worship and in private devotions. Efforts have included the use of liturgical dance or enacted drama as expressions of prayer. Work is being done around movement and prayer and many Christians on retreat have experienced "walking meditations," "relaxation techniques" and other forms of "body prayer." Many of the writings by women have offered appropriate criticism of patriarchal forms of prayer and women are offering the church new forms and postures for prayer.

While the progress that is being made is helpful for embodied prayer, much of the contemporary practice seems to move forward without having looked very deeply at the past. Part of this may have to do with the inaccessibility of historic teachings on prayer form and posture. One can now buy cheap paperback copies of the content of historical prayer, yet there is little in print which offers classical instruction and guidance for the body. Perhaps a reason why so little history of prayer practice has been handed down is

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[2] Anthony de Mello, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 13.

that so much of the study of prayer posture seems to have been done in the context of liturgical study and church history. Less has been done in ascetical, spiritual or practical theology.

It is time for practitioners of prayer to explore the history of prayer posture. Among those Christians who practice praying are those who are involved in spiritual direction. Whether spiritual direction is envisioned as individual direction, group direction or some less structured format-- the work of spiritual direction is often work of integration. The person seeking direction is often trying to bring his or her life before God in the hope that God might make of it a piece, a unity, a whole. In spiritual direction we seek to bring together heaven and earth. We seek to bring together justice and mercy. We seek to bring together body and spirit. Kenneth Leech puts it nicely when he writes of the need for spiritual direction to include the whole person:

> Prayer is not an activity of the mind, for God is not in the head. It is an activity of the whole person, and God is in the wholeness. So the *askesis* of the body is vital, and in the preparation for prayer attention needs to be given to the achievement of physical stillness, the acceptance of the rhythm of eating, sleeping and relaxing which are essential to a balanced spiritual life. Spiritual direction will involve a good deal of time spent in these areas, for lack of discretion in these matters can mean spiritual as well as physical harm.[3]

Leech refers to *askesis*, or the training or discipline of the body. Spiritual direction often includes the discussion of *askesis*-- sometimes *askesis* is discussed when a directee has a tendency to "over train" or try too hard; at other times *askesis* comes into the discussion when a directee might very well benefit from closer attention to spiritual disciplines.

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[3] Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: An Invitation to Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 173.

Those engaged in spiritual direction as directors can benefit from a familiarity with some of the historic postures for Christian prayer. Such familiarity can inform those times when a directee is looking for new forms of prayer, or when words simply fail to complete the prayer and something else is needed. Knowledge of prayer postures can enhance one's freedom to pray. As the body learns to open and position itself in new shapes, a person may find that the spirit also is opened to new dimensions and possibilities.

André Louf explains that "prayer cannot happen without the body, either with beginners or with those who are advanced in prayer. Gradually, prayer and the Spirit take possession of the body. Body and spirit are bound up inseparable together." Louf goes on to tell a story handed down through the eastern monastic tradition from Prior Agathon.

> [The human] is like a tree. The foliage stands for the toiling of the body, the fruit is the interior attention. For the sake of this fruit we have to apply ourselves thoroughly to the attention of the heart. We need both the protection and the strength of the leaves, that is, physical exertion.

Louf explains, "Thus *ascesis* and contemplation, physical and spiritual work, always go hand in hand."[4]

A study of prayer posture is in no way meant to be prescriptive. Nor is it meant to limit or circumscribe the activity of prayer. It is not suggested that all those who pray should necessarily add new postures to their prayers, and certainly there are many who because of health or other physical condition are unable to perform certain postures. What is suggested, however, is that any Christian-- regardless of denomination,

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[4] André Louf, *Teach Us to Pray* , ed. Hubert Hoskins (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), 57.

regardless of intellect, regardless of faith experience, regardless of physical condition--might benefit from using the body more prayerfully. As this paper attempts to trace some of the history of Christian prayer posture and then relate this history to practices of spiritual direction, it does so in the spirit of Psalm 139. May it avoid any "grievous paths," and may it we be guided in the "ancient ways" to uncover and reclaim one important aspect of the Christian tradition of prayer.

POSTURES IN THE SCRIPTURES

It has long been the custom of Christians to use scriptures as a manual for prayer. Yet often this seems to include only a few prayers and to include very little about the context or posture of the prayers. We speak of "praying the psalms," yet we do not often suggest shaking a fist at God (perhaps the most appropriate gesture to accompany some psalms). We speak of praying the Lord's Prayer, yet we rarely suggest ways in which our bodies might reflect the kind of childlike trust and faith Jesus teaches. A closer reading of biblical posture can help us to embody the scriptures in new ways.

Postures From the Hebrew Scriptures

The Hebrew scriptures affirm the human body as a part of the created order which God pronounced "good." It would have been strange had God not approved of humanity, since God gave divine breath as the force that made humanity come alive. While there are certainly those traditions within the Hebrew scriptures which seek to discipline and control the body, there are also many words which affirm the celebration of the body as a gift from God. It was appropriate to use the body in relationship to God. The body could be used for praise and exaltation, as, for example, in dance. Celeste Snowber Schroeder, herself a liturgical dancer and writer, notes the many different words which were used for dancing in the Hebrew scriptures. "Words are used such as skip, whirl, rotate, leap, dance in a playful manner, or dance in a circle." Snowber points out that in 2 Samuel 6, when King David "dances" before the Lord, five different Hebrew words are used to

describe his movement.[5] David's dancing before God is enacted prayer-- prayer which is expressed in the celebration of the body. Miriam danced with tambourines in a prayer of thanksgiving (Exodus 15:20; 32:19) and the psalmist embodied prayer as God turned tears of wailing into steps of dancing (Psalm 30).

The people of Israel used their entire bodies to communicate with God, sometimes including words and sometimes not. Common postures for prayer in the Hebrew scriptures include bowing, kneeling and falling down before God. The psalmist prays: "I will bow down toward your holy temple, in awe of you" (Psalm 5:7), and "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!" (Psalm 95:6).

At times the response to God was one of total surrender. When the Angel Gabriel appears before Daniel to help him understand his visions, Daniel writes:

> So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate... As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet. (Daniel 8: 17-18)

Jeremiah rolls on the ground and writhes in pain as he hears God's judgment against the people. His is a posture of lamentation and distress. Jeremiah calls for postures of penitence from the people of God suggesting that they "[P]ut on sackcloth and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only child." (Jeremiah 6: 26).

Scriptures sometimes use the phrase of "falling on one's face" before God or before a messenger of God. When the Lord appears to Abraham and announces that God

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[5] Celeste Snowber Schroeder, *Embodied Prayer: Harmonizing Body and Soul* (Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1995), 70.

is going to make a covenant between God and Abraham's lineage, Abraham "fell on his face." (Genesis 17: 3).

Another example can be seen when Joshua leads the people to defeat the city of Jericho. Joshua has a vision of a man standing before him. He asks the man on whose side the man is fighting, and the image of a man replies, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." At that point Joshua "...fell on his face to the earth and worshipped." Joshua asked the messenger what he should do and the messenger first replies, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." (Joshua 5:13-15).

Joshua's removal of his sandals is reminiscent of the calling of Moses. For both, the act of removing the shoes becomes a part of the prayer. It becomes a gesture of prayer, a movement toward placing the body in a position for worship. This posture of prayer is commemorated in a contemporary liturgy by Mickie Dempsey as she writes, "There comes a time in one's life when the only religious thing left to do is to take off your shoes. Take off your shoes to celebrate the creek bed, the good earth, or a God who wants to speak to you from a burning bush."[6]

Celeste Shroeder and others point out that the Hebrew conception of the human form was not simply that of a body, but of a body with a spirit, a body with a soul. The body is understood as a reflection of an inner reality. The liver, the bowels, the stomach, the heart, the mind, the soul-- all become mixed in the "body-spirit" or "body-soul" that has been created by God. Shroeder explains it this way:

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[6] Mickie Demsey, "Celebrate Summer: A Family Service" in *Liberating Liturgies*, (Fairfax, VA: Women's Ordination Conference, 1989), 15.

> The Old Testament is rich in bodily expression: posture, gesture, dance, and dramatic expression are woven into the text.... Room is given for expressing the full dimension of the body-soul, from grieving to rejoicing, from humility to anger, from reverence to jubilation. Prayer is not only petition, but become adoration, confession, supplication, praise and lament-- all lived out through bodily expression.[7]

Postures of Jesus and the Christian Era

It was Jesus' custom to "go out into a lonely place" for prayer. Though he sometimes prays in front of the disciples and others, Jesus also gives the model of withdrawal for special times of prayer. It was at such a time as this that the disciples asks him to teach them how to pray. The "Lord's Prayer" is Jesus' answer. In St. Luke's Gospel Jesus follows the discussion of the Lord's Prayer with a parable about persistence in prayer. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and he weeps over the death of his friend, Lazarus. Especially the Eastern Christian tradition has seen in Jesus' weeping evidence of the significance of tears in prayer and much has been written about the "gift of tears" in prayer. When Jesus chases away the moneychangers from the temple in Jerusalem, he is moving for justice, but he also is preserving quiet in the temple, for as he says, "My house shall be a house of prayer" (Luke 19:45). It was Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane who "threw himself on the ground and prayed... " (MT 26:39). St. Luke suggests that it was Jesus' custom to pray on the Mount of Olives, and implies that he was doing nothing unusual when "he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed..." (Luke 22:41).

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[7] Schroeder, 64.

Jesus seems to have assumed that the typical posture for praying was one of standing, as was common for religious Jews. This is the case when Jesus tells the disciples, "...Whenever you stand praying...." (Mark 11:25).

St. Paul continues the Hebrew tradition of bringing one's body into prayer and worship: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship"(Romans 12:1). In St. Paul's words one can find a clear relationship between the words of a prayer and the postures with which one prays, as in Ephesians 3:14: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name."

St. James gives us a brief image of one posture of prayer which will be discussed more fully below. He urges his audience that whenever people of faith suffer, they should pray. Whenever they are cheerful, they should pray. If they are sick, "They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5: 14).

Jesus and other voices from the Christians scriptures affirm the body and its place in worship and prayer. Through prayer and practice the "fleshly" body is to be transformed into a "spiritual body." This new, spiritual body is not a ghost or some disembodied aspect of the real human form; rather, this new spiritual body is a fully-realized, complete and whole body, transformed by faith in Jesus the Christ.

SECOND AND THIRD CENTURY PRAYER POSTURES

In the first few centuries of Christianity, many of the discussions of the body in prayer are found in directions having to do with Christian worship. The *Didache* is a manual for Christian worship and community which comes from the early second century. It makes it clear that the whole person is to be involved in Christian worship. Baptism is not merely a spiritual experience, for it involves the yielding of the body to the church, the yielding of the body to God. Water is poured upon the head of the person being baptized, and it is poured three times, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The *Didache* does not specify how the body is to be carried or used during the eucharist other than to note that the cup of wine is served before the bread, and that the bread is to be "broken off the loaf."[8]

The *Apostolic Tradition*, attributed to Hippolytus, is another manual for Christian worship which discusses the use of the body in prayer. We learn from this document what Christian worship must have looked like in Rome around in the early third century. The body is involved in the laying on of hands, in the exchange of the kiss of peace, in kneeling, in anointing, and in making the sign of the cross.

The act of "laying on hands," normally with one person's hands being placed upon the head of another person, was used to convey and impart a prayer of blessing. Hippolytus discusses the use of laying on hands during the ordination of deacons and presbyters, but he also discusses certain groups of people who are honored and "set

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[8] "A Church Manual: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the *Didache*" in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. and trans. Cyril C. Richardson, vol. 1 of *The Library of Christian Classics* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 174-5.

apart" for particular service. Among these who have hands laid upon them in prayerful ceremony are widows, readers and healers in the church.

Hands are also laid upon catechumens as they prepare for full church membership-- baptism and the first eucharist. Hippolytus notes that hands are laid upon the catechumens daily during the period of examination, "[W]hile they are being exorcised" [of evil spirits.] On the Saturday before Easter the catechumens are told to kneel and pray while the bishop lays his hands upon them in a final act of exorcism. Then, writes Hippolytus, the bishop "shall breathe on their faces; and when he has signed their foreheads, ears, and noses, he shall raise them up." Before being baptized three times, the catechumens are anointed with the "oil of exorcism." After baptism, there is an additional anointing, with "oil of thanksgiving" by the presbyter. The bishop then lays his hand upon the forehead of the newly baptized and signs him or her upon the forehead. The bishop then kisses each of the new Christians.

Hippolytus is one of the earliest to mention making the sign of the cross. He exhorts Christians, first and foremost, to make the sign as a protection against the devil:

> If you are tempted, sign your forehead. For this sign of the passion is displayed against the Devil, if it is made in faith, not to please men, but through knowledge, presenting it like a breastplate. For when the Adversary sees the power of the Spirit (which comes) from the heart, outwardly displayed in the likeness of baptism, he will tremble and flee, when you do not strike him but breathe on him... Let us sign forehead and eyes with the hand, and escape from him who is trying to destroy us."[9]

Hippolytus relates the Christian act of making the sign of the cross to the act of Moses just before the Passover. Just as Moses led the people to sprinkle blood on the doorposts

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[9] *Hippolytus: A Text for Students*, trans. Geoffrey J. Cuming (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books Ltd, 1987), 28.

and lintels to signal to the Angel of the Lord that people of faith lived in a particular dwelling (Exodus 12), so the Christian should make the sign of the cross to signify the body as a household of the divine.

In addition to what a Christian might be taught about posture during the formation period before baptism, by the third century there were also particular writings which explained various aspects of prayer. Origen of Alexandria, around the year 233, offers the following instruction regarding posture:

> ...[A]lthough there are a great many different positions for the body, [the person praying] should not doubt that the position [standing] with the hands outstretched and the eyes lifted up is to be preferred before all others, because it bears in prayer the image of characteristics befitting the soul and applies it to the body.... And kneeling is necessary when someone is going to speak against his own sins before God, since he is making supplication for their healing and for their forgiveness. We must understand that it symbolizes someone who has fallen down and become obedient, since Paul says, 'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.'[10]

Origen also uses common sense in suggesting postures, cautioning those with specific health concerns to adjust their prayer postures accordingly. If one suffers from some disease of the foot, Origen suggests, one may sit to pray. Likewise if one is sick or has a fever, one may lie down for prayer. By using the examples of sitting or lying down to be exceptions, Origen continues the traditional belief that the typical prayer posture is one of standing.

Another teacher of prayer is Tertullian, a North African Christian writer who died in 225. His understanding of the Christian life often seems uncompromising and overly

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[10] Origen, "On Prayer," in *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 164-65.

rigorous. Yet, Tertullian was an important voice in establishing early church order and teaching. His comments on postures for prayer, phrased in a negative manner, are an explanation of how *not* to pray. One should not sit down in the presence of God, but should pray standing with humility, like the Publican in the Gospel: "not even lifting the hands too high but raising them temperately and meetly, not even holding up our eyes in presumption."[11] Tertullian also teaches that kneeling is a posture much more appropriate to private prayer than prayer in public. (This belief would later be emphasized by the sixteenth century Reformers John Calvin and John Knox.) Tertullian links standing in prayer with a sign of the resurrection. Because of this, he could not endorse kneeling on Sundays during Eastertide, since Christian worship, he believed, should express the resurrection faith in word and in body:

> In the matter of kneeling, ... prayer is subject to a diversity of observance because of those few who abstain from kneeling on Saturdays. Since this dissent is actually a cause for concern among the churches, the Lord will give the grace so that they will either cease from this practice or continue to do so without causing scandal to others. We, however, according to the tradition we have received, abstain from kneeling only on the day of the Lord's resurrection, indeed from every posture and practice of anxiousness, postponing all business transactions as well, lest we give any place to the devil. The same applies to the time of Pentecost, which is distinguished by this same solemnity of exultation.[12]

Peter of Alexandria, another third century writer also comments on the appropriateness of kneeling and invokes the wisdom of Irenaeus (d. 200 AD):

> It is good for us to remember both that we have fallen in sin and that we have risen by the grace of Christ. We therefore kneel on six days for prayer, as a sign of our fallen state. But on the Lord's day, we do not kneel, as a sign of the resurrection through which by the grace of Christ

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[11] Tertullian, quoted in D. Richard Stuckwisch, "Principles of Christian Prayer from the Third Century," *Worship* 71:1 (Ja 1997), 13.

[12] "Tertullian's Tract on Prayer" quoted in *The Postures of the Assembly During the Eucharistic Prayer*, eds. John K. Leonard and Nathan D. Mitchell, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 24.

> we have been freed from sin and death. This custom has its origin in apostolic times as the blessed Irenaeus, bishop and martyr of Lyons says in the book *De Paschate*, in which he reminds us that we are not to kneel during Pentecost since it is of the same importance as the Lord's Day.[13]

The question of whether to kneel on Sundays would continue to be debated. In fact, it was taken up at Nicea and the issue was made formal in Canon 20: Kneeling should be forbidden on Sundays and in the great 50 days. It would not be until the Middle Ages that kneeling became customary again on Sundays.

Already by the second and third centuries there developed something of a "standard" position for Christian prayer. It was common among ancient peoples to pray in a standing position, facing the direction of the rising sun. Early Roman coins show a figure in this position which represented the personification of *Pietas*. Christians took this a step further, "baptized" the secular piety and saw in the east the rising son, the image of Christ's resurrection. This *orans* (Latin for "one who prays") position, standing with the arms outstretched and often with the palms facing upward, became the classic Christian prayer position. The image of one standing for prayer in *orans* position can be found on very early Christian sarcophagi, sometimes combined with an image of the Good Shepherd. Figure 1 shows Noah depicted in the orans position, from the Roman catacombs of Priscilla. In early Christian art, the orans position is often assoicated with Christians who have died or those who underwent persecution. Some have supposed that the orans position signifies the soul's ascent to God, whether in death or in the life of faith.

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[13] *The Postures of the Assembly During the Eucharistic Prayer*, 24-25.

Fig. 1. Noah praying in the orans position in the open Ark, catacombs of Priscilla. Photocopy from Alfred Heidenreich, *Die Katakomben*, eds. Emil Bock and Robert Goebel. Reprinted in *The Catacombs* (London: Christian Community Press, 1962), frontispiece.

FOURTH CENTURY CATECHESIS AND PRAYER POSTURE

With the official sanction of Christianity in the fourth century, churches were besieged by people requesting baptism. In response to this demand, the process of catechesis, or preparation for the sacraments of the church, began to receive careful attention from bishops and other Christian teachers. Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom at Antioch all gave such teaching. Within these catechetical lectures and sermons we see a variety of postures used for prayer.

Cyril of Jerusalem

The last five of Cyril of Jerusalem's twenty-five lectures are directed to new Christians who have been recently baptized. In these lectures Cyril reminds his audience of the mysteries in which they have been inducted and asks them to reflect upon the postures, prayers and promises they have made.

As described by Cyril, the baptismal rite begins in the outer hall of the baptistery, as the catechumens face West. The catechumens are told to stretch forth their hand against evil, as a gesture of renunciation. Standing upright, with arm outstretched, catechumens renounce Satan, all his works, all his pomp and all his service. After the renunciations, they turn from West to East and are ready to proceed with the baptismal rite. Clothing is put off and the entire body is anointed. As Cyril recalls, "You were anointed with exorcised oil, from the very hairs of your head, to your feet, and were made partakers of the good olive tree, Jesus Christ"[14]

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[14] *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 60.

The person is then baptized, in the trifold-fold manner in the name of the Trinity and then led out of the water and anointed again, this time with the "oil of gladness." While the pre-baptismal anointing seems to have been over the whole body, this post-baptismal anointing is very specific. The newly baptized are anointed on the forehead, on the ears, on the nostrils and on the breast.

Cyril not only takes seriously the bodies of those who partake of the elements, but he also notes the particular postures of the priest. Cyril notes that the deacon provides water for the priest to wash, while the other presbyters are standing at the altar. The priest washes his hands. The deacon then gives a signal to the congregation and a kiss is exchanged, and for Cyril, this kiss seems to carry with it a reminder and exchange of forgiveness. The *sursum corda* and other prayers follow, concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

In the eucharist, body meets body. The body of the believer encounters the body of Christ. Cyril believes that it matters how one receives the body of Christ and so he even gives instruction as to how the hands should be held when receiving the eucharist:

> ...[C]ome not with thy wrists extended, or thy fingers open; but make thy left hand as if a throne for thy right, which is on the eve of receiving the King. And having hollowed thy palm, receive the Body of Christ, saying after it, Amen....Then after having partaken of the Body of Christ, approach also to the Cup of His Blood; not stretching forth thine hands, but bending and saying in the way of worship and reverence, Amen....And while the moisture is still upon thy lips, touching it with thine hands, hallow both thine eyes and brow and the other senses"[15]

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[15] *St. Cyril of Jerusalem*, 79.

Cyril cautions the faithful to take special care in receiving the body of Christ, and to treat any crumbs of bread exactly as one might treat gold dust! Cyril wants the believer to truly savor the experience of communion, and to feel its mystery and power.

Theodore of Mopsuestia

Theodore of Mopsuestia also indicates posture and gesture in his homilies on baptism and eucharist. Theodore was a friend and fellow-pupil with John Chrysostom. He became a priest in 383 and was made bishop of Mopsuestia in 392. Theodore represents the Antiochene school of thought both in theology and in exegesis. Of sixteen homilies (some scholars number them as seventeen) intended for catechetical instruction, the first ten are addressed to the catechumens and the last six deal with the Lord's Prayer, Baptism and Eucharist. There is disagreement over whether the homilies were given in Antioch or in Tarsus or Mopsuestia. Since Theodore is often commenting upon a liturgy which is different from that used by John Chrysostom in Antioch, the argument is made that the Theodore's homilies were more likely to have been given in Tarsus or Mopsuestia, between 383 and 392.[16]

The order for baptism as described by Theodore differs from others in that it begins with mention of a sponsor or "godparent" for each of the baptized. One of the initial gestures that is a part of the ritual involves the godparent inscribing the name of the catechumenate in a church book. In Theodore there is no stated ritual for turning from West to East as the catechumen renounces Satan. Rather, the candidate for baptism stands upon sackcloth.

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[16] Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1989), 45,

> You stand, therefore, with outstretched arms in the posture of one who prays, and look downwards and remain in that state in order to move the judge to mercy. And you take off your outer garment and stand barefooted in order to show in yourself the state of the cruel servitude in which you served the Devil for a long time....[17]

As the words of renunciation are said, the candidate genuflects while the rest of the body remains erect. The arms are outstretched to God and the candidate gazes heavenward. While the candidate is in this position, the priest approaches and signs with chrism upon the forehead. After this anointing by the priest, the candidate's godparent or sponsor approaches and spreads a linen cloth, an *orarium*, upon the candidate's head. Whereas the candidate had been kneeling, bareheaded, in the manner of a slave (as Theodore describes it); the candidate's head is now covered, symbolizing freedom. The godparent or sponsor than raises the candidate to a standing position.

Approaching the baptismal font, the candidate is undressed and anointed over the whole body. The candidate goes into the pool and as is baptized in a triple immersion. The candidate, feeling the hand of the priest upon the head, is to bow the head, as if assenting to the statements being made by the priest as he baptizes. After leaving the water, the newly baptized is dressed in a radiant, white garment and is signed on the forehead by the priest in the name of the trinity.

Theodore underscores an incarnational theology as he describes the host on the altar. He explains that it is Christ's very body which is upon the altar, and that this body is given as a sacrifice. Because of the sacrificial nature of the eucharist, the rite involves Christ being carried to the altar, stretched out upon the altar, and sacrificed for us.

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[17] *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist*, ed. and trans. A. Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies in Christian Documents, vol. 6 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd. 1933), 32.

Deacons spread linen cloths upon the altar reminiscent of the linen clothes used in burial. Deacons stand on either side of the altar and stir up the air with fans, to keep anything in the air from defiling the body of Christ. By doing this action, Theodore says, the deacons represent in an image the ministry of the angels. Prayers are said, all exchange the holy kiss:

> The priest, then, begins by giving peace, and the Church crier, who is the deacon, cries and orders all to give peace one unto another so that they may do that which the priest is doing, and so that in giving peace one to another and in embracing one another they may make a profession of their mutual concord and of their love to one another.[18]

Theodore, like Cyril, then describes the *lavabo*, or hand-washing of the priest. All of these physical, bodily actions are a part of the eucharistic prayers. Theodore reminds those who worship to watch, to pay attention, blend their prayer with those of the priests.

The priest gives physical expression to the words that are prayed. He begins the anaphora (in the Western Church, the Canon of the Mass: including the eucharistic prayer, consecration, intercession and communion), and all are standing. The priest looks toward heaven, breaks the bread and makes the sign of the cross over bread and wine. The priest then places several pieces of bread into the cup to demonstrate the impossibility of separating the body from the blood. Just as the elements cannot be separated, so the believer cannot be separated from Christ. The sacrament is then received in a prayerful manner:

> ...Each one of us draws nigh while looking downwards and stretching out both hands. By his looking downwards he signifies that he is offering a congruous thing to God through adoration, and giving thanks for his receiving the body of the King... and in the fact that both his hands are

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[18] *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, 92.

> stretched out, he confesses the greatness of the gift which he is about to receive.[19]

Ambrose of Milan

Ambrose of Milan wrote two major catechetical works. *On the Sacraments* (probably written between 380 and 390) was intended for those who have been newly baptized and was probably delivered as lectures during Easter week. *On the Mysteries* (written between 387 and 391) was written for a wider audience, a "general" audience, in some ways, and one to which he was unwilling to reveal the mysteries of the sacraments. Because of its treatment of the liturgical practices, *On the Sacraments* is the more helpful document for a discussion of gesture.

Some have argued that Ambrose might have known of Cyril's *Mystagogical Catecheses* and borrowed from them. Ambrose, like Cyril, has the candidate for baptism begin by facing West, then after the renunciation of Satan, turns to face East. Where Cyril speaks of the anointing of the ears, Ambrose refers to a pre-baptismal ritual of "opening." Ambrose explains, "We said, 'ephpheta,' which is 'be opened,' that each one who is coming to grace might know what he is asked, should be bound to remember what he answered."[20] Ambrose is also like Cyril in his explanation of the efficacy of the eucharist, in his recommended language for the renunciation of the devil, and in the language of regeneration related to baptism.[21]

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[19] *Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, 113.
[20] *St. Ambrose: On the Sacraments and On the Mysteries*, trans. T. Thompson, ed. J. H. Srawley (London: SPSK, 1950), 123.
[21] E.J. Yarnold, S.J., "Did St. Ambrose Know the Mystagogic Catecheses of St. Cyril of Jerusalem?" *Studia Patristica* 12:1 (1975), 186-88.

While there are similarities between Ambrose and Cyril, Ambrose departs from the other by his use of the posture of footwashing. Ambrose defends the practice by explaining, "We are not ignorant that the Roman Church has not this custom. Her type and form we follow in all things, however, she has not this custom of washing the feet."[22] Ambrose suggests that perhaps Rome simply dropped the custom because there were too many feet to wash!

After the washing the feet of the newly baptized persons, there comes what Ambrose describes as the "spiritual seal." It is not clear whether Ambrose means by this a second prayer with oil or simply a prayer using the laying on of hands. Some suggest that this was simply a "pneumatic hand-laying prayer," rather than any kind of episcopal chrismation. In other words, perhaps what is referred to here is simply a kind of spiritual anointing rather than a physical one. The question over exactly what Ambrose is describing continues today, as it has been raised in recent discussions over twentieth-century reforms of the Roman rite of confirmation.[23]

John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom was the appointed preacher in Antioch for twelve years, from 386 to 397. During this time, he preached a number of sermons which were meant for those undergoing preparation for baptism. A continuous theme for Chrysostom has to do with the importance of Christian moral behavior and orthodox faith.

As in the catechetical teachings of Theodore, Chrysostom attributes great importance to the posture of the candidate for baptism. He writes that the candidate

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[22] *St. Ambrose*, 73.
[23] Maxwell E. Johnson, "The Postchrismational Structure of Apostolic Tradition 21," *Worship* 70:1 (Ja 1996), 16-34.

should renounce evil while kneeling, the eyes gazing heavenward. Kneeling symbolizes an external attitude of captivity for Chrysostom.

> ....The kneeling position for the act of renunciation and commitment means for Chrysostom two things, and it corresponds in its own way to Cyril's interpretation of turning from servitude to the freedom which comes from the confession of faith in Christ as Messiah. It represents both man's fall and consequent enslavement, but it expresses at the same time what happens in the act of commitment to Christ.[24]

Chrysostom also interprets kneeling as an act of unity with others, according to Galatians 3:28 where Paul says that for those who are baptized "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free...," but all are one together. Chrysostom makes the point that in order to enter the church, all must kneel: rich or poor, beautiful or plain.

Also for Chrysostom, the arms of the candidate are opened toward God in a gesture of joy and thanksgiving; a movement that receives God even as it confesses being received by God.

Summary of Fourth Century Practices

The Fourth Century teachers understood that when a person is baptized, it is the entire person that is being washed and made new. Catechetical teachings of Cyril and Theodore, John and Ambrose have shown us a number of gestures and postures which helped to embody the worship of the fourth century. On the basis of these catechetical teachings we can summarize the major postures for prayer which began to be taught in the churches, and thus, the postures which early Christians were invited to assume.

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[24] Hugh M. Riley, *Christian Initiation* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1974), 66.

Upright Positions

In one of John Chrysostom's sermons he describes the posture for the entire assembly during the prayers for the dead as being that of the *orans*: all are standing, with arms outstretched. While the various catechetical lectures and sermons discussed above take for granted that the presiding minister at the liturgy stands (and by custom, the congregation imitates the action of the president unless directed otherwise by a deacon) and kneeling has been shown to have been discouraged on Sundays, several ancient East Syrian documents give directions for the priest to stand, bow and kneel. The anaphora of Addai and Mari, called the *Anaphora of the Apostles*; as well as the Maronite *Sharar* are thought to derive from a common source compiled sometime between the second and fourth centuries. The texts describe the priest "inclining to the right and the left of the altar." The priest then bows and prays, giving glory to God. The priest extends his hands for part of the prayer and then inclines for more prayer. The anaphora continues with the priest alternately bowing and inclining. During the prayer of the oblation, the priest kneels.[25]

In most places, kneeling during the eucharist did not seem to begin until the eighth or ninth centuries.

Postures for Anointing

As described above, various gestures and postures were used for anointing. Anointing was used in ancient Israel at times of celebration and to attribute honor to a guest. In the ancient Near East, at times, both objects and people were anointed for

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[25] *Addai and Mari: The Anaphora of the Apostles*, trans. and ed. Bryan D. Spinks (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1980), 15-25.

religious or civic solemnities. Kings were anointed. Emperors were anointed. The One for whom Jews waited and in whom Christians put their hope was the *messiah*, originally, "the Lord's anointed."

In fourth-century documents the details of an anointing are not always clear. E. J. Yarnold, while admitting that the term so often used for anointing, *consignatio*, may or may not imply the use of oil; nonetheless summarizes three anointings with prayer common to the baptismal rites (though not necessarily present in each rite):

1. A first, pre-baptismal anointing, sometimes of the whole body, with olive-oil for the purpose of exorcising and strengthening.
2. A post-baptismal anointing with chrism to confer the Holy Spirit.
3. Another anointing, the position of which varies, as does its purpose. In some churches olive-oil is used, in other chrism.[26]

As Ambrose notes, the first anointing is like that of an athlete, getting ready for a contest. Cyril mentions the whole body being anointed, as does the writer of the Apostolic Tradition. Both Cyril and Chrysostom comment on the anointed and the fact that while both men and women are naked, the fact that they are unashamed shows how holy the activity is and how through preparation for baptism, they have returned to a primitive innocence.

In both Chrysostom and Theodore, anointing of the forehead with the sign of the cross takes place after the act of renunciation of evil. The sign of the cross makes real the "sealing" of Christ. Through the anointing, Christ claims the baptized as his own.

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[26] E.J. Yarnold, "The Ceremonies of Initiation in S. Ambrose," *Studia Patristica* 10:1 (1970), 456.

The Sign of the Cross

Hippolytus is one of the earliest writers who comments upon making the sign of the cross, but we can also find its use mentioned or assumed elsewhere. Theodore of Mopsuestia describes how the priest places his hand upon the forehead of the candidate for baptism and the candidate "is signed." Theodore goes to great length to clarify that it is not the priest who signs, just as it is not the priest who baptizes. Rather, the power and authority for baptizing and signing are Divine and belong alone to God. God's power is proclaimed through the body in the form of the cross being signed.

In addition to the sign of the cross being made upon the forehead, the *orans* position itself-- standing with the arms outstretched-- also was understood to be a form of the sign of the cross. Tertullian speaks of Christians not only raising the hands, but extending them. It was said that when Ambrose was dying, he prayed in the form of the cross, with his hands spread out.

The Kiss of Peace

St. Paul uses the term, *philema hagion*, holy kiss, in four of his letters. An exchange of peace or a greeting of peace meant more than simply an exchange of affection. It carried with it an exchange of the spirit of Christ, and in so doing, it is a prayer enacted. Hippolytus mentions a holy kiss several times in the *Apostolic Tradition*: at the ordination of a bishop and in relation to the catechumens. Tertullian, in *De oratione* writes that some in the community are refusing to exchange the kiss of peace during the prayers, with the excuse that they are fasting. Tertullian points out that this abstention from the kiss merely draws attention to their fast and thus violates the "secret

spirit" in which a fast should be carried out. Tertullian shows how the act of the kiss cannot be separated from the prayer itself. They exists as a unity or they have no meaning.

> What prayer is complete if divorced from the 'holy kiss'? Whom does peace impede when rendering service to his Lord? Whatever our prayer be, it will not be better than the observance of the precept by which we are bidden to conceal our fasts; for now, by abstinence from the kiss, we are known to be fasting.[27]

For Tertullian, prayers are sealed by the kiss of peace. The kiss is a communication of God's love among the people.

The kiss of peace was closely associate with particular prayers in the worship service. As the *lavabo* became more ritualized in the East, this eventually moved the kiss of peace from its previous place (at the end of intercessory prayers) and placed it at the beginning of eucharistic service, before the anaphora. In Rome and in North Africa the kiss still came after the eucharistic prayers. Particularly for Augustine, the kiss of peace was associated with the Lord's Prayer and the enactment of the phrase, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," thus the kiss of peace could be understood as an enacting of the Lord's Prayer.[28]

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[27] "De oratione," quoted in L. Edward Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books, Ltd., 1996), 19-20.
[28] *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship*, 25-26.

EARLY MEDIEVAL PRAYER POSTURES: MODES AND MANUALS

In addition to the wealth of postures for prayer which come down through the ages through various traditions of Christian worship, in the early Middle Ages there are also various "prayer systems" developed by individuals. A prayer system can be thought of simply as a cluster of postures used by an individual and taught to others. The postures work as a series and relate to the type of pray that is prayed. Once one was familiar with the several modes of prayer, one could "choreograph" one's prayers accordingly. Several of these systems were contained in prayer manuals which included illustrations of the various postures.

Peter the Chanter's Manual of Prayer

One such teacher of prayer postures was Peter the Chanter, who lived in the last part of the twelfth century and was chanter at the Paris cathedral in 1183. He was an intellectual and was reported to have been a great preacher, teacher and theologian. In 1191 or 1192 Peter wrote a work which he meant as an elaboration upon Christ's teaching on virtue and vice. Peter in fact wrote another work several years later which had to do with what Christ had taught regarding penance. Prayer, for Peter, fell into one of the categories of penance. *De oratione et speciebus illius*[29] is one of the earliest of what could be called a "prayer manual" which includes illustrations of the various postures discussed. See Figures 2a through 2g.

Mode 1: Standing while having the arms and joined hands over the head "as far as you can extend them." The face is turned toward heaven.

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[29] *The Christian at Prayer: An Illustrated Prayer Manual Attributed to Peter the Chanter*, trans. and ed. Richard C. Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 20-65.

Fig. 2a. Mode 1, Standing (Ottobeuren version). Figures 2a-2g are photocopies of various versions of Peter the Chanter's manual. All are from *The Christian at Prayer: An Illustrated Prayer Manual Attributed to Peter the Chanter*, trans. and ed. Richard C. Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), plates.

Fig. 2b. Mode 2, Cruciform (Venice version)

Fig. 2c. Mode 3, Standing, hands together (Altzella version)

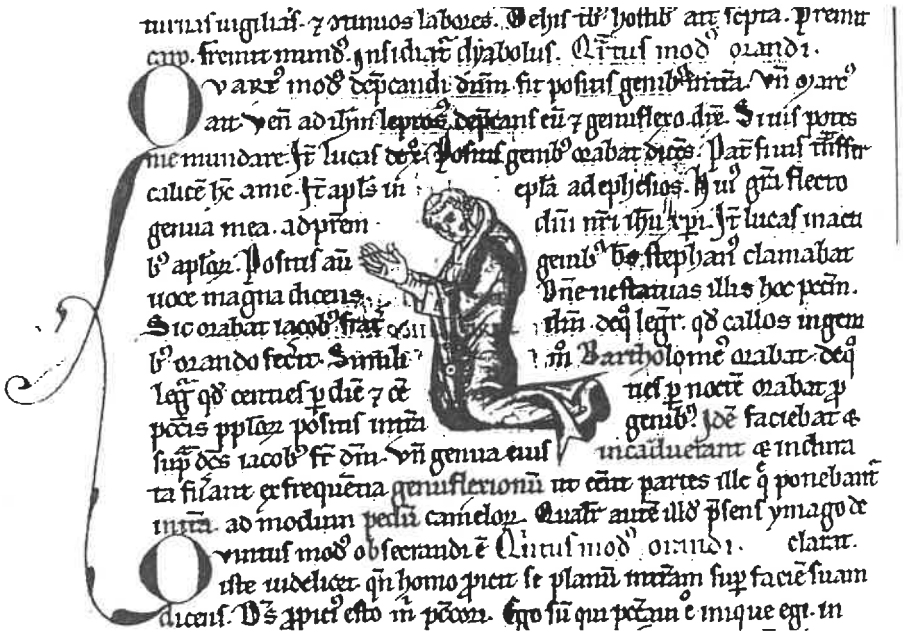

Fig. 2d. Mode 4, Kneeling (Ottobeuren version)

Fig. 2e. Mode 5, Prostration (Padua version)

Fig. 2f. Mode 6, Bowing (Altzella version)

Fig. 2g. Mode 7, Proskynesis (Ottobeuren version)

Mode 2: Standing in a cruciform shape, with the hands and the arms stretched out "similar to a cross," as Peter writes.

Mode 3: Standing with "the hands stricken together and contiguous, extended and directed before the eyes" In explaining the derivation of this form, Peter points to Jesus' time in the temple as a boy when he was "standing up to read." Peter also cites Esdra as an example, "standing up and opening a book" The idea is that one regards one's hands as though one were reading, waiting upon God for the words to read.

Mode 4: Kneeling for prayer. Peter is precise as to what he means by kneeling. It does not only involve one knee, but requires both knees "so that the knees and the toes are both at the same level."

Mode 5: Full prostration- a position in which mouth, knees and feet all hug the ground. Peter suggests that the posture of prostration is most effective for praying with tears. It is, for him, the most penitential and is thought to be the most reliable in having God hear the prayer.

Mode 6: Standing (the fourth standing mode) and bowing with the "head and the kidneys." One begins from an erect position, then makes a very deep bow from the waist.

Mode 7: This position is slightly different from simply kneeling. This is the only non-scriptural posture, but Peter says that it is posture used by Gregory the Great's aunt. It is a position which Richard Trexler calls, "proskynesis," a position of the camels, whereby the one kneels, then places all one's weight on the knees and elbows, while lowering the stomach and face near to the ground, without touching the ground.

Peter agrees with the long tradition of standing to pray. Peter rules out sitting (as long as one is able-bodied) and he doesn't recommend using kneelers or any other "prop" that might support the posture. Peter refers to a kneeler as "artificial feet."

The Chanter feels that private prayer is better than corporate prayer, since public prayer allows too much for a "parade of vanity." Yet, Peter repeatedly speaks of the

value of praying in church. His system of gestures was meant to be performed/prayed in public as well as in the prayer cell. As Trexler puts it:

> ...Peter the Chanter's goal was to publicize through his work a publicly performed, yet also privately binding, catholic system of devotion rooted in the Bible. There were three reasons to pray with the mouth publicly, he said. The desire to offer God verbal obsequy was one, and the wish to witness publicly one's devotion was another. But the third reason, the need for instruction, 'to teach by word and example' was certainly a pre-eminent reason for corporal as well as verbal prayer. The right modes had to be shown to be learned. That was certainly the business of the lecturer or preacher, but it was also that of a writer like Peter who foresaw illustrations of what he described in words.[30]

St. Dominic's Nine Modes of Prayer

There are similarities between the prayer manual of Peter the Chanter and the Nine Modes of Prayer of St. Dominic, which comes a little later. Dominic de Guzman founded the Order of Preachers in 1216. In his organization and leadership of the order he developed what some refer to as a "Dominican" spirituality. This was and is a way of practicing one's faith which seeks to connect three components of the spiritual life: prayer, preaching and posture.

Dominic valued the mind but did not do so at the expense of the body. The order was marked from the beginning by an emphasis on scholarship, learning and informed, careful preaching. The order was not comprised of monks, but of friars-- those who resembled the monastics in their piety yet remained very much a part of the world in which they taught, learned and preached. Dominic's goal was to develop a body of great preachers-- those who would preach not just with their lips, but also with their lives. A

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[30] Peter the Chanter, 43-4.

"Dominican" spirituality is one which seeks to unite the body, the mind and the spirit in such a way that the sermon does not end in speech, but flows from the preacher's whole being.

Dominic understood the temptation for a good preacher to become preoccupied with matters of the mind and to neglect the wisdom of the body. Perhaps for that reason, in Dominic's method of prayer there is careful attention given to posture. The condition of the body is as important as the condition of the mind. In the fourteenth century it would be Dominicans who would popularize the praying of the Rosary, a method whereby the fingers moving beads are as active as the words that are prayed.

Though Dominic left no written documents of his own, there is an account of his method of prayer, reportedly written down by an eyewitness. "On the Nine Ways of Prayer," or *De Modo Orandi*, is thought to have been written between 1260 and 1288. Prayer according to the Nine Ways involves the whole person: body, mind and soul. As Simon Tugwell has pointed out, the Nine Ways are based upon the belief that "[C]ertain attitudes and gestures of the body can powerfully dispose us for prayer; and then, in turn, prayer, when it reaches a certain intensity, bursts out into bodily effects."[31]

The "Nine Ways" are illustrated in Figures 3a through 3i, photocopies made of a set of postcards. Though the documentation on the postcards is scant, these are most likely photographs of the original miniatures in Codex Rossianus 3 in the Vatican Library, an early illustrated copy of the "Nine Ways." The various gestures or modes of prayer can be summarized as follows:

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[31] Simon Tugwell, O. P., The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1978), 7.

Fig. 3a. Mode 1, Humbly bowing. Figures 3a-3i are photocopies from a set of postcards with the citation: *Manos, Ross, Bibl. Vat; Ufficio Libri Litturgici Domenicani, Piazza P. D'Illiria, 1-00153 Roma.*

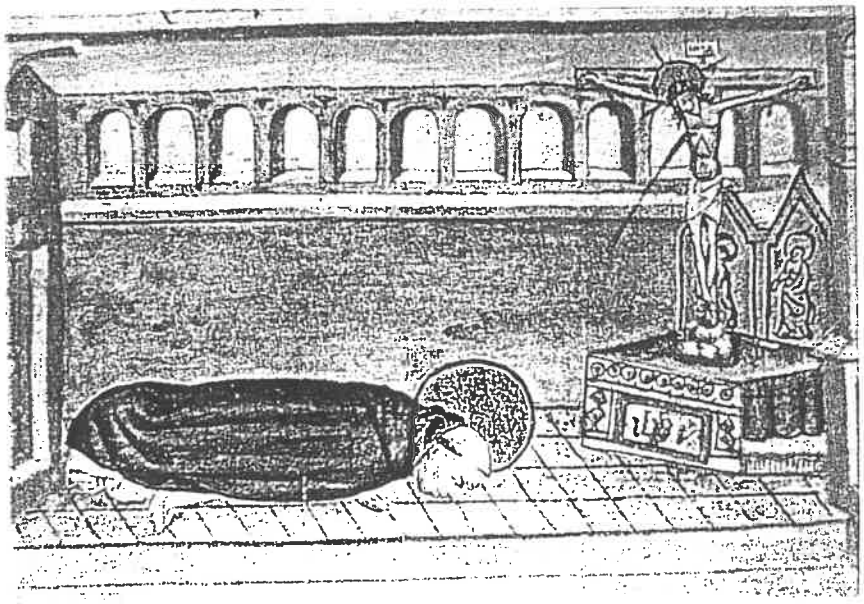

Fig. 3b. Mode 2, Prostration.

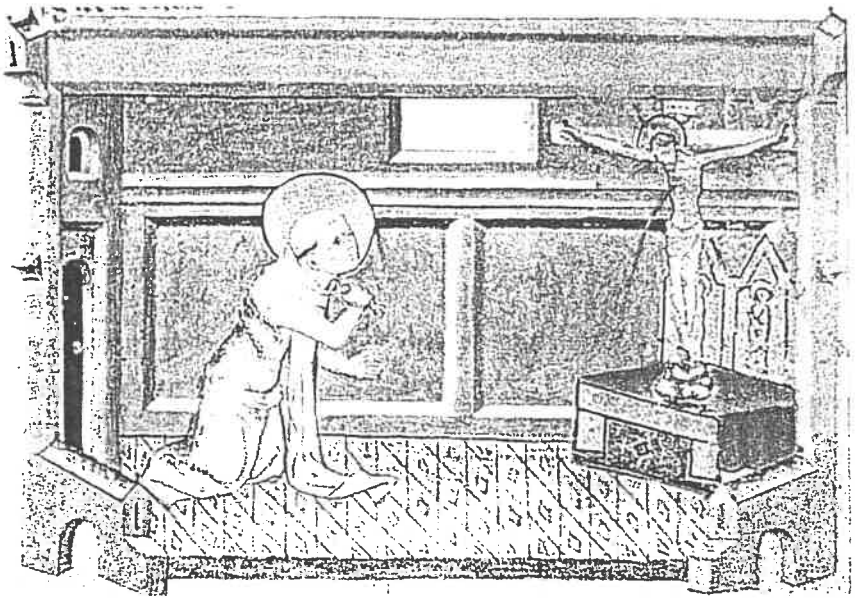

Fig. 3c. Mode 3, Flagellation

Fig. 3d. Mode 4, Genuflection

Fig. 3e. Mode 5, Upright with hands.

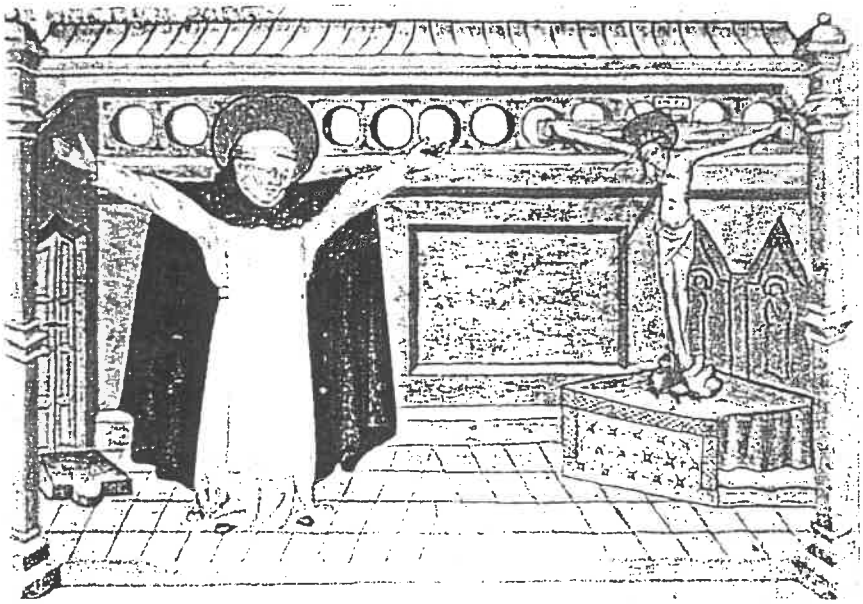

Fig. 3f. Mode 6, Cruciform

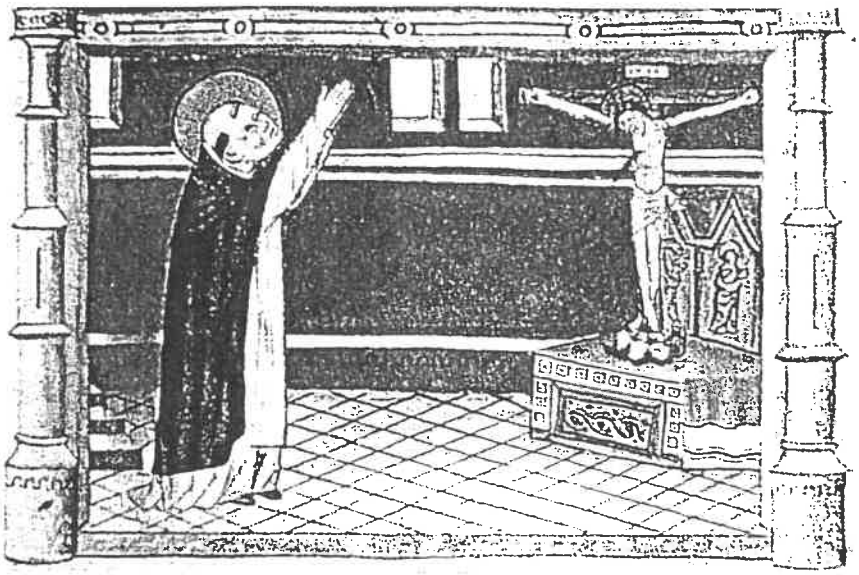

Fig. 3g. Mode 7, Arms toward heaven

Fig. 3h. Mode 8, Lectio Divina

Fig. 3i. Mode 9, Sacred Conversation

Mode 1: Bowing at the waist, a gesture of humility and reverence

Mode 2: Full prostration

Mode 3: Flagellation (Though often illustrated as a private exercises, the Dominican Constitutions recommended that flagellation take place only in the Chapter Room on ferial days after compline. This was meant to avoid excesses which might occur if flagellation were practiced privately.)

Mode 4: Genuflection, a gesture which also could represent prayers of intercession

Mode 5: Standing upright with hands out and open in front, as though reading a book; or standing upright with hands joined tightly together in front; or hands raised to shoulder height as a priest might say mass.

Mode 6: Cruciform, Standing upright with hands and arms straight out, like a cross. This gesture implored Divine power and was also often used for intercession.

Mode 7: Standing upright, stretching the whole body straight up like an arrow, with arms straight above the head, toward heaven. Hands might be slightly open as though ready to catch something dropped or handed down from heaven.

Mode 8: Seated prayer while reading, meditative reading or *lectio divina.*

Mode 9: Either while walking, standing or sitting; engaged in holy conversation, *sacra conversazione.*[32]

It says something about the character of Dominican spirituality that Dominic did not leave specific prayers to be prayed or prayerbooks to be followed. Instead of repeating the words of Dominic, followers were encouraged to repeat his gestures.

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[32] "The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic," in Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, ed. Simon Tugwell, O. P., (New York: Paulist, 1982), 94-103.

WEST MEETS EAST

As was stated above, one of the reasons for writing this paper has to do with what seems to be an almost automatic acceptance in the west of anything which even remotely represents "eastern spirituality." Critics of western Christianity say that our churches and institutions are hopelessly patriarchal, morally bankrupt and spiritually hollow. Therefore, suggest critics, one can look to the east for spirituality in a more pure state. Such critics forget that Christianity is still itself primarily an eastern religion, even amid western institutionalization. Such critics also overlook those who have gone before them who have been enriched by eastern techniques, yet have maintained an orthodox Christianity. One can read Thomas Merton, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama and others for the theology behind such intermingling of traditions, but for practice, and especially for our discussion of prayer posture, two Christian teachers stand out for their helpfulness.

Postures of Herbert Slade

Father Herbert Slade's prayer postures developed out of a Christian contemplative community and are also influenced by yoga forms and the yoga sutras of Pantajali. Slade's postures are derived from his work with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, the Anglican religious order, and from having lived in India for eleven years. In *Exploration into Contemplative Prayer* Slade initially suggests a number of purely physical postures, which are meant to begin training the body for movement and to allow a person to begin to pay attention to his or her body.[33] These "loosening up exercises"

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[33] Herbert Slade, S.S.J.E., *Exploration into Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Paulist, 1975),173ff.

are positions that resemble various positions of yoga. They include a simple standing position, a lying-down position, and various positions which allow the stretching of the limbs and trunk.

Posture and prayer are combined in what Slade refers to as the "symbolic acts," which follow the "loosening up exercises." By "symbolic acts," Slade refers to positions which hold and convey symbolic meaning and move one into a state of prayer. In this category, Slade suggests six positions, as outlined below and illustrated in Figures 4a through 4f.

1) Self-denial (*padahastasana*) This is a movement into stillness, and begins in the standing position. One joins the hands over the center of the heart and begins to raise the arms up over the head and breathe in. Retracting the abdomen, one bends at the pelvis and reaches over with the hands toward the feet. The head is lowered toward the knees and the body brought to a relaxed form, in the bent over posture. During the time of 20 breaths, Slade suggests for meditation such texts as Mark 8: "Leave self behind; take up your cross; come with me;" Galatians 2:20: "The life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me;" or the "Prayer of Humble Access" from the eucharist, "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table." After twenty breaths or so, the body is slowly brought back up into a standing position.

2) Standing in the Cross (*tadasana*) Slade suggests standing still, with the hands brought together in front of the body, relaxed, but held together. The body remains still and relaxes as one imagines the vertical axis of the cross going from the feet through the spine, to the head. The horizontal axis of the cross is imaged as passing through the

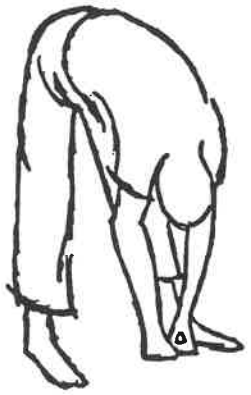

Fig. 4a. Self-denial. Figures 4a through 4f are photocopied from Herbert Slade, *Exploration into Contemplative Prayer*, 181-84.

Fig. 4b. Standing in the Cross

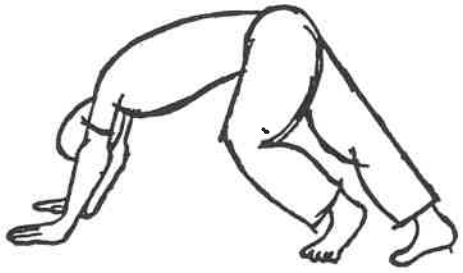

Fig. 4c. Turning to Christ

Fig. 4d. Walking in Christ

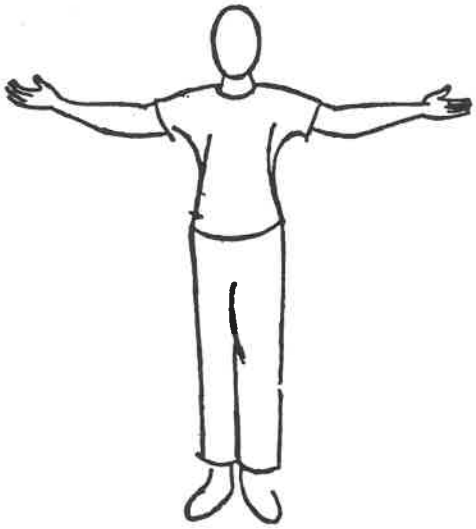

Fig. 4e. Cosmic Christ

Fig. 4f. The Kiss of Peace

shoulders. The body is relaxed as the posture is held. (Notice that the arms are not extended outward in this posture.) Slade suggests that this position be held for five breaths and then relax the body. Suitable meditations include 1 Corinthians 6: "Your body is a shrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit;" 1 Corinthans 12: "You are Christ's body," and even the selection from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 2: "What a piece of work is a man [human]. How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty. In form, in moving, how express and admirable. In motion like an angel. In apprehension how like a god. The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals."

3) Turning to Christ (*sury namaskar*) This is one of the more technical and "yogic" forms, for which Slade recommends an instructor's help. The posture eventually involves the body bent forward on the hands, with the legs spread behind, almost as though one were stretching the quadriceps to prevent shin splints. The meditations have to do with turning to Christ and following in his way.

4) Walking in Christ This posture is a standing-still, walking posture. Moving slowly, the weight is shifted to the right foot, while the left foot is raised. One breathes in and breathes out as the left leg reaches the ground. Eyes are focused at a point ahead. Weight is then placed upon the left foot, while the right foot is raised, very slowly. This continues for five to ten minutes at steady, though slow pace. Among the meditation responses Slade offers is the prayer from the Sarum primer: "God be in my head...."

5) Cosmic Christ [The cruciform position] The body stands very still, breathes in and raises the hands and arms from the sides. Hands and arms are brought to shoulder

height, or as high as is comfortable. Breathe out while bringing the hands together in front of the body. Words to accompany the posture might include Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God; His is the primacy over all created things."

6) The Head of the Body [Kiss of peace] This posture continues the practice of the early church. The phrase, "kiss of peace" is meant to be taken literally: it is a kiss; not a handshake. For this posture to be re-introduced into Christian community, a thorough education effort should accompany its introductions. Also, there might be made certain "methods of escape" for those who simply do not find this a helpful posture! For some, given the choice between having to participate in the ritual "kiss of peace" or undergo St. Dominic's Third Mode of Prayer (flagellation), the choice would be the Dominican one. As with all postures, common sense and pastoral sensitivity are required.

Postures of Anthony de Mello

Father Anthony de Mello was a Jesuit priest who died in 1987. He was born in India and for many years was the director of the Pastoral and Formation Center in Lonavla, India, near Bombay. De Mello's teachings on prayer and meditation are infused with wisdom he has learned from Buddhists and Hindus. For instance, de Mello suggests that one way to deal with distractions in prayer is simply to keep one's back straight! He confesses that he has no scientific proof, nor has he ever heard of any, but he says he has heard of some Zen masters who can look at a room of people who are meditating and the master can tell whose mind is wandering simply by observing their posture! De Mello suggests that the surest way to keep the mind clear of distractions

while praying is to sit in a position in which the back is straight-- either cross-legged on the floor, in a lotus or half-lotus position, or against a wall, or on the edge of one's chair.[34] Like eastern teachers of meditation, de Mello spends a great deal of time focusing on the breath and on what today would be called, "mindfulness:" becoming aware of one's own body. De Mello is careful to remind the person praying to *feel* one's own body's sensations. Even in relaxation and body awareness exercises, one often simply envisions the arm or the leg or the abdomen, rather than to feel the particular part. De Mello suggests paying close attention to every sensation. If one picks up no sensations from a particular body part, one can try to contract and release the muscles in that part. This will help to connect with what is truly felt, instead of one simply learning to "think about feeling."

De Mello suggests a number of postures to experiment with in prayer. One is a posture of self-offering. One might begin by raising the hands very slowly until they are stretched out in front, then the hands are turned so the palms are facing upward. The head is then raised to look toward heaven, if the eyes have been closed, they are now opened in an effort to gaze at God. As an alternate posture, one can experiment with bringing the hands together to form the shape of a cup or chalice-- this shape can be held close to the body, or offered outward and upward to God.

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[34] De Mello, S. J., *Sadhana*, 20.

De Mello sounds as though he has learned like the Zen masters to read a person's devotion in their posture. He writes:

> People sometimes run into difficulty in their prayer because they fail to attend to their body in prayer; they fail to take their bodies along with them into the holy temple of God. You say you are standing or sitting in the presence of the risen Lord, but you are carelessly slouched in your chair or you are standing in a very slovenly fashion.... You are obviously still not gripped by the living presence of the Lord. If you were turning to him fully I would notice some of this in your body.[35]

[35] De Mello, S. J., Sadhana, 38.

POSTURES OF WOMEN

To this point we have discussed various prayer postures used in the Christian Church. Yet, to be honest, we have mostly discussed the postures of men at prayer, or at least, the postures which have been taught by men. It has been difficult to uncover similar texts which are written by women or about women at prayer. There may be a number of reasons for this.

One reason has to do with the power which was given women. Until recent years, the presence of women in teaching positions and positions of power in religious institutions was limited. Also, probably because most of the academic and ecclesiastical scholars were men, texts written by women were not translated and were not always valued. In her book on women mystics, Carol Lee Flinders raises an interesting point that may help to explain why we have so few women's religious writings, much less, prayer manuals or lectures by women on postures for praying.

> A recurring pattern emerges. Excluded by church law from active ministry in the church, women were more likely than men to spend long hours in contemplative prayer and to have the kind of visionary experiences that can result. Awed by their sanctity, humbled often, their confessors would assume responsibility for the correctness of their doctrinal understanding.[36]

In the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Clare of Assisi and others we can learn much of the content of their prayers, but we can only infer their method or their posture. In all probability, the outward form

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[36] Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 3.

of the prayer may not have mattered very much to these women who experienced such a full inner reality of God's presence.

Kathleen Fischer's book, *Women at the Well* points to the ways in which some women have felt unwelcome and shut out of the church because of the forces of patriarchy. She suggests that women understand the spiritual life in different ways from men and that these ways need to be encouraged in the life of prayer and religious practice. Women's experience needs to be valued. Mutuality and support are to be favored over authority and hierarchy. Fischer suggests the importance of groups for women's spiritual formation and for prayer:

> Many forms of prayer can be most effectively taught and learned in a circle or a group. Most groups pray together as part of their gathering. Many women mourn the loss of liturgical expression that relates to their experience; they thirst for life-giving ritual. Groups can provide opportunities for symbolic expression that fill the void created by current sexist practice in the church. They enable women to experience inclusive language and alternate forms of prayer and worship.[37]

Marjorie Procter-Smith suggests that feminist prayer begins with "the dangerous knowledge of women's bodies, of women's lives [and] dares to address the divine in a different voice."[38] Procter-Smith suggests that as women develop their own prayer rituals they listen to their own bodies. Their bodies "speak" differently than men's bodies, and women's bodies know different realities. Women's bodies know that they are a part of nature, they are attentive to their emotions and the emotions of others, they know that being female in a patriarchal world sometimes means risk and fear. Procter-

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[37] Kathleen Fischer, *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 23.

[38] Marjorie Procter-Smith, *Praying With Our Eyes Open: Engendering Feminist Liturgical Prayer* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 83.

Smith suggests that women must reject prayer postures which reinforce offering or sacrifice, submission, and even an unqualified celebration of the body, since this can deny the "historic and ongoing violence" done to women's bodies.[39] Katherine Cartwright Knodel, a Lutheran pastor, translates some of Procter-Smith's concerns into somewhat more practical guidance for a local church:

> Praying with our bodies can be an incredibly healing response to our bodies' societal woundings. But body prayer can also be incredibly threatening. Our bodies hold our secret hurts. Some of these hurts are as extreme as incest, rape, miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth, or spousal abuse; in childhood or adolescence we could have been horribly taunted over a bodily imperfection. I encourage women to be gentle with themselves and to begin bringing their body into prayer by using something relatively nonthreatening. Some might crave the safety of a group; others will find work in a group too threatening and will prefer to pray privately.[40]

Spiritual directors and others who work with women might do well to experiment with the use of what have been called women's "ritual actions." These are ways of being and doing which are said to be more closely related to women's experiences. These ritual actions include reflexivity, naming, healing, smudging (a personalized use of incense), dancing, chanting, use of storytelling, reverencing ancestors, use of natural objects and settings, use of domestic objects and skills, and eating.[41] Spiritual directors must be especially sensitive to issues of body image, boundaries when suggesting use of the body in prayer, and hospitality; such that a directee might always feel free to choose the level and kind of participation in prayer forms.

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[39] Procter-Smith, 64.
[40] Katherine Cartwright Knodel, "Nurturing Women's Spirituality" in *Attending Parishioners' Spiritual Growth*, ed. Thomas P. Williamsen (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1997), 53.
[41] Leslie A. Northup, *Ritualizing Women: Patterns of Spirituality* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 38-45.

Feminist spiritual writers have claimed "embodiment" to be a central theme of women's spirituality. Yet, we have seen that many men in the church have also taken seriously the role of the body in prayer. The differences might be seen in the use of the body and in the understanding of whether the body is to be controlled and disciplined, or whether the body is to be enjoyed and celebrated with abandon. Some might argue that these are not mutually exclusive and that the God who meets us in prayer invites both joyful discipline and sober abandon. What is clear from the ongoing and creative work in women's spirituality is that spiritual directors must be sensitive to issues of language, image and authority.

THE STUDY OF HISTORICAL POSTURES AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The goal of this paper is to suggest that a knowledge or a familiarity or (perhaps even an openness) to different postures for prayer can be beneficial to the practice of spiritual direction. It is not the intention here to suggest that a spiritual director necessarily needs to be a person who has specialized knowledge of certain fields of study. There is enough gnostic tendency in late twentieth century spirituality without suggesting that spiritual directors need to hold certain academic degrees or program certifications. Marjorie Thompson puts it nicely when she writes:

> ....[I]n Christianity, spiritual guidance is not the sole preserve of those who have a special call or training to carry on the tradition. It can be offered by any layperson who is seen to be mature enough in faith to offer guidance to others. The Christian church trusts that the Holy Spirit is active within the community of believers. The grace of the Spirit is given to all Christians, not only to its ministers and priests. Professed vows and ordination are no guarantee of spiritual maturity! Different graces are given to different people according to God's wisdom. Some lay persons are more gifted in spiritual guidance than many clergy. This has been so since the time of the early church.[42]

While it is to be expected that people from all different educational and experience levels might be called to act as spiritual directors, it is also fair to expect that the sensitive director will want to grow and deepen in his or her ability as a director.

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[42] Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 103.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCLUDING POSTURE IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

The degree to which posture can become a part of the discussion of prayer will vary according to the way in which spiritual direction takes place. The term "spiritual direction" is meant here to carry the broadest possible meaning. It includes individual, planned, one-on-one sessions of a director and directee. It includes one-on-one conversations between lay volunteers in religious settings and the various persons with whom they may minister. Spiritual direction may take place unexpectedly within a pastoral conversation, in a group setting, at retreat, or even in the context of public worship. Given the variety of forms spiritual direction may take place, the various postures of prayer can be suggested, exhibited, or taught.

The introduction of posture in settings of spiritual direction may be met with some resistance and may seem awkward. Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P. admit that adults may feel overly self-conscious as they begin to try to connect their prayers with their bodies, but this difficulty may be an important piece to spiritual growth. They suggest,

> ...Establishing an intimate relationship with God requires the same kind of risk taking that any significant relationship entails, and a part of what we are called upon to renounce in the life of prayer is our own comfortable sense of ourselves as self-contained, "dignified" adults. Serious prayer requires personal courage as well as commitment...[43]

Linette Martin suggests that one reason we are sometimes reluctant to move our bodies into postures for prayer is because we feel as though we must wait until we "feel" a certain way before we assume a particular posture. If we don't feel like kneeling, we

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[43] Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., "Getting Ready to Pray: The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines," in *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, eds. Robin Mass and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 137.

don't. If we don't feel like standing, we don't. Martin observes that we are invited to allow intention to develop from the body as well as from the interior motivations of the heart. She believes that "The associations between body language and mental attitude are so strong that if one is changed, the other will eventually change too."[44] She cautions us that we may think we are being hypocritical by acting one way and not feeling as though our intentions match the actions. Martin nevertheless encourages us to move into our prayers, to form different postures, and to pray. The attitude will come later.

One-on-One Spiritual Direction

In traditional spiritual direction settings of director and directee, there come times when discussion of prayer posture is appropriate. Gloria Ray Carpeneto suggests times when a directee might be ready for more involvement of the body. Her specific interest is in "body work," but her thoughts are equally appropriate for other postures of prayer. Carpeneto suggests that the director listen carefully to the vocabulary used by the directee. If there begin to be references to the body in common speaking, this may indicate the body's readiness for fuller expression. "Is a spouse becoming a 'pain in the neck'? Did a boss make a directee's 'blood boil'? Is a directee increasingly needing to 'bite her tongue' as she prays?'" Carpeneto suggests that "If a directee's conversation becomes increasingly full of references to the body in reality and in metaphor, that might be a sign that she or he is ready for bodily reconciliation." By "body work," Carpeneto is referring to various schools of massage, or Therapeutic Touch, Reiki, or "movement re-education therapies." Though she is suggesting a specific way blending the physical and

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[44] Linette Martin, *Practical Praying* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 1997), 35.

the spiritual, her words encourage spiritual directors to observe more deeply the body of the directee:

> Behaviors of directees, in prayer and in session, may reveal tension, a tight holding or clenching of muscles, almost a defensive armoring. A director may observe constant fidgeting, crossing and uncrossing legs, inability to sit comfortably, to simply "be in one's skin."[45]

Often in spiritual direction, a directee will discuss the "busyness" of life. Sometimes there is an inability to sleep, or the diet is changed, or the person explains a kind of "spiritual restlessness." By beginning a conversation about the use of the body in prayer, the director invites the directee to bring literally the "aches and pains" of life into prayer.

Margaret Guenther notes that "In our tendency to spiritualize we neglect our bodies... I find myself inquiring about nutrition, exercise, and sleep habits, and I border on the authoritarian in discussions of self-care."[46] As Guenther notes, often when a spiritual director suggests that a directee take more seriously some aspect of the body, the director is really simply giving the directee permission to be selfish, something that those in spiritual direction often seem very afraid to do. If a directee seems overly tired or sluggish, or if the directee seems unusually excited, perhaps mention of the body should be included in the conversation.

Another important occasion for the discussion of posture in spiritual direction is when a directee says that she or he "can no longer pray" or is having great difficulty praying. Sometimes, as Anthony de Mello explains, "You feel unable to pray, when your

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[45] Gloria Ray Carpeneto, "Healing by Touch and Hearing the Holy: Interweaving Body and Spirit," *Presence: The Journal of Spiritual Directors International* 5:1 (January 1999): 13.
[46] Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), 77.

mind is distracted, your heart has turned to stone and your spirit seems dead." This is the very time to let the body lead in prayer. One can move through positions, postures or gestures and let these be prayers. By enacting our prayer when words fail, then, says de Mello, "Some of this devotion you are expressing through your body is likely to seep through into your spirit and after a while you may find it much easier to pray."[47]

Posture can also help at the most difficult times to pray, such as when one is grieving. Joyce Rupp suggests that with God's grace, we can move from "saying our good-byes" to actually "praying" our good-byes. Though Rupp's spoken words contain great wisdom, she is also a person who understands the wisdom of the body and the ability of the body to aid in healing from grief. Rupp offers prayers that include the body in such creative ways as ripping paper, breaking a glass jar into pieces (toward praying about brokenness), taking one's shoes off and using the shoes as a symbol (for journey or pilgrimage), walking while praying, and standing with the arms spread out like an eagle's in an attempt to understand how God, like an eagle carries us, defends us and upholds us.[48]

Within the spiritual direction session itself, the director might begin the session with silent prayer and also suggest a bodily position for this prayer. The director might preface this by observing that in prayer we do bring our whole bodies to God, and so, if it is agreeable to the directee, this initial time of prayer together might be used to experiment with various positions of the hands or the arms, standing or perhaps kneeling together. Care should be taken in introducing posture, and in this the director's skills of

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[47] Anthony de Mello, S.J., *Sadhana*, 40.
[48] Joyce Rupp, O.S.M., *Praying Our Good-Byes* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1988), 119-179.

discernment will be important. If a relationship of spiritual direction has not developed beyond a certain point, it might feel overly intimate for the discussion to even approach the use of the body in prayer. In early stages of a relationship, a less startling movement into posture might begin with suggestions for the use of the hands only.

In his discussion of hands, Giancarlo Moroni highlights the use of the hands through scripture. He cites examples of ritually washing the hands, holding the hands over the head in a gesture of desperation and sorrow, using the hands to bless, holding the hand of another, clapping the hands, and cupping the hands.[49] For a spiritual director to simply suggest that the hands be held open during prayer might be a new idea for a directee. One could move further by suggesting the hands be held in front of the face, as though reading (see above for this posture in Dominic and Peter the Chanter). One might try praying with the fingers spread apart, or praying with the hands clinched in fists. Moroni suggests that hands have a linguistic code of their own, provided that gestures express a particular message. For example, he suggests that hands at rest might represent the shape of a cup; hands open might be held straight and represent a road; and hands closed in a fist might represent a rock.[50] Using Moroni's idea, we might move on to develop a hand language for our prayers. Through practice and experimentation, particular gestures of our hands might become nonverbal prayers. This would be one way in which a director might suggest to a directee the development of enacted prayer.

Postures should be encouraged in such a way that the directee is invited to try something new and discard it if it doesn't seem to work for him or her. Gabriel

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[49] Giancarlo Moroni, *My Hands Help Out to You: The Use of Body and Hands in Prayer* trans. Paul Burns, Exeter, UK: Burns & Oates, 1992), 37-47.
[50] Moroni, 84.

O'Donnell suggests a simple method for experimenting with posture, assuming that an individual already has or is willing to commit to a regular time for prayer. O'Donnell suggests that one week be set aside for experimenting with kneeling. For the first five minutes of a prayer time, try kneeling. For the rest of the prayer time, just sit. Then for the last five minutes of the time, stand and try to hold the arms out in the *orans* position. After one week of this, change the postures for the second week. During the next week, experiment with substituting a posture of prostration for that of standing during the last five minutes. O'Donnell suggests that after the second week, the person should meet with someone and discuss the feelings. Meeting with a spiritual director can clarify which postures might help one's prayers, as well as which postures may hinder praying.[51] Together, new postures might be created or noticed to already be postures of prayer.

Much of the art of spiritual direction has to do with inviting the directee to see the holiness of God which is already in his or her life. A young father who watches his daughter play soccer, may come to see his standing as an act of prayer-- prayer in thanksgiving to God for the child and prayer for the safety of the child. A women who stoops and bends in the garden may come to regard her postures as prayers in solidarity with others who farm. Perhaps her prayer become one for those who farm out of necessity rather than hobby, or for those who work with the earth and face natural disasters.

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[51] Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, 140.

POSTURES WITH GROUPS

Spiritual direction in groups may sometimes allow for more freedom in exploring prayer posture. Often a group session ends with the group holding hands and praying together. This would be a natural place for a director or facilitator to suggest new postures. The group might be invited to stand and raise arms in the *orans* position. The group might kneel together or might even pray in a prostrate position in a special place. If the group is one that sometimes sings together, postures can be introduced through song. More imaginative groups may also wish to work together to enact or represent with their bodies a prayer from the Bible or the prayer of one of the group members. As with individual spiritual direction, the use of touch in a group needs to be considered carefully. Touch, movement and posture should be carefully introduced. No one should ever be made to feel uncomfortable.

When introducing prayer posture in a group, Gabriel O'Donnell suggests planning for a thirty-minute session allowing an additional fifteen to thirty minutes for evaluation by the group members. He suggests that the group be oriented toward an image, a cross, a candle, or some other focusing image. For the first five to ten minutes, the group is lead in praying the *orans* position-- standing, with arms bent in front with hands up. Someone who is not participating in the posture reads a passage of scripture, a short prayer or other meditation. The reading should be slow, deliberate and meditative. The group is next led in a posture of kneeling for five to ten minutes. For the last two or three minutes, while kneeling, the group is invited to extend the arms so that the arms with the trunk of the body form the shape of a cross. Again the very same passage or meditation

is read. Finally, for the last five to ten minutes the group is invited to lie prostrate on the floor. As before, the same meditation is read. After silence, the group is invited into a time of evaluation and exchange, of sharing and coming to group wisdom.[52]

Spiritual Direction in Larger Groups

Some might argue that spiritual direction does not take place in larger groups. While discussion of prayer in larger groups carries different dynamics from one-on-one spiritual direction, the quality of the discussion and the content of the discussion can often be very similar. Especially in more Protestant churches, detailed discussion of the life of prayer takes place within the worship service or in settings of Christian Education. As Howard Rice has pointed out, Puritans often sought out one another to discuss problems or questions about prayer, and Reformed leaders such as John Calvin offered much spiritual guidance through letters and sermons.[53]

Worship leaders and teachers with larger groups might introduce postures for prayer in subtle ways. Invitations for posture can be included in brief rubrics either written down or spoken. The person who leads a prayer of confession might begin with the words, "As a symbol of our openness to God, I invite you to pray with your hands open before you, ready to receive the grace of God." The Roman Catholic Parish of St. Francis Xavier in New York City invites the entire congregation to stand and hold hands during the chanting of the Lord's Prayer. Hands are then raised high, still held together at the doxology of the prayer. Also in that parish, at the conclusion of the mass the priest invites the congregation to "lift your faces to God and receive the benediction." As

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[52] Ibid., 150.
[53] Howard L. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 134-135.

people look toward the ceiling, the signal is sent powerfully that the blessing at the end of the mass is not from the priest, but is a blessing that is from God.

A parish that continues to explore different postures for prayer is the Episcopal Church of St. Gregory Nyssen in San Francisco. The congregation seeks to include elements of traditional Jewish and Christian Orthodox worship. During most of the prayers at St. Gregory's the congregation stands with the priests, following the Nicene ruling that kneeling only be for certain times of special penitence. When the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the table, there is a hymn and there is a dance. The congregation engages in the *Tripudium* step: three steps forward and one step backward. The step is explained and all are invited to join in, placing one hand for stability on the shoulder of the person in front. During the prayer of Great Thanksgiving at the eucharist, the people join the priests in raising their hands in the *orans* position. Some raise their eyes toward heaven, as well. During the eucharistic prayers all pray in the eastern direction.[54]

Churches which are less formal in their worship or which are less tied to particular traditions in worship might experiment much more freely. Members of Pentecostal and some evangelical churches might find a scholarly study of prayer posture a strange thing indeed. For these people, the posture of prayer simply follows the prompting of the Holy Spirit. One might be "slain in the spirit," one might be moved to dance, one might be moved to speak in tongues, and one might be moved to laughter.

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[54] Richard Fabian, *Worship at St. Gregory's* ([San Francisco]: All Saints' Company, 1988), 4-45.

In churches which do follow an historic or traditional worship structure, leaders should take special care to teach the tradition behind a particular posture before introducing it. Some churches have a "Time with the Children" as part of the regular worship service and this is a good time to introduce postures to the children and eventually introduces them to other parts of a congregation. Retreats and special days of festivity or solemnity can be extremely appropriate times for introducing new postures. Newsletters, church bulletins and sermons are also other ways of teaching and encouraging prayer postures. Regardless of the occasion, the worship leader or educator might do well to notice what his or her own body is signaling to a larger group. Is the leader comfortable with his or her body? Is the leader willing to experiment? Is the leader will to "look foolish" in front of others? Margaret Guenther mentions the importance of the spiritual director's modeling a posture of openness and receptivity. She recalls Grantley Dick Reid's book on natural childbirth in which it suggested that if the birthgiver were able to relax the muscles in her face, she eventually could relax completely. Guenther admits she cannot always change her facial muscles, but she can at least position her hands in a way that communicates openness and availability.[55] The body will be communicating, whether words accompany or not.

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[55] Guenther, 21-22.

CONCLUSION

> The Church tries to make contemplatives of us not merely by teaching us how to turn our minds and hearts to prayer, but also by showing us how to turn our bodies into prayer; but here too custom can stale her lessons and turn what should be a vital creative process into a routine which has lost its significance.[56]

We live in an information age and Christians are trying to understand what it means to be faithful in such an age. Perhaps because of this it should be no wonder that many in the Church attempt to share the message of Christianity through the exchange of information. Churches, religious communities, retreat centers and spiritual guides now have Web pages on the Internet, as though good graphics, a clear map and a schedule of services will communicate something of the truth of Christ. Flags are flown in front of churches, books are sold and commercials are tastefully placed on classical radio stations-- all in an attempt to lure people into an experience with the risen Christ. Yet, in most cases, if one inquires about the faith, one is given more information. Spoken, written, and perhaps sung, Christians try to explain themselves and their God.

Where is the body in all of this? Christians seem to sit more and more and more. What would be the effect of groups of Christians who sought to explain themselves and their devotion less, and rather, aimed at modeling a different way of life? This "different way" would be seen in the way that believers interact and relate to one another. It would be seen in gesture and posture, in the various ways in which the body is given to God in worship and the ways in which the body is given to one another in the world, especially those most in need. Especially those most in need of prayer.

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[56] Gerald Vann, O.P., "The Gestures of Worship," *Worship* 26:11 (Oct 1952), 506.

This paper has sought to pull together a variety of teachings about posture and prayer. Like so much of the prayer life, it is far more important simply *to pray*, than to read and talk and analyze prayer. Yet where there are areas in which we do not have sufficient resources, stories or models; we have homework to do. This paper, for me, has been a bit homework. If this paper (or the energy behind its composition) in any way frees some-body to pray in a new or old way, or if it enhances conversations of spiritual direction however they may take place, then it has been successful.

May God be in our head, and in our understanding.
God be in our eyes, and in our seeing.
God be in our mouth, and in our speaking.
God be in our heart and in our thinking. God be in our
broken, earth-bound bodies,
and in all our believing.
Amen.[57]

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[57]My own adaptation of the words, "God be in my head." The original words are thought to be from a 1514 printing of the Sarum Primer but are also found in many other 16th century devotionals and prayer books.

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