

Incarnation, Posthumanism and Performative Anthropology: The Body of Technology and the Body of Christ

MICHAEL S. BURDETT*

University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom

*Address correspondence to: Michael S. Burdett, D.Phil, Room C02 Humanities, University of Nottingham: University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, United Kingdom. E-mail: Michael.Burdett@nottingham.ac.uk

This essay argues that a Christian incarnational response to posthumanism must recognize that what is at stake isn't just whether belief systems align. It seeks to relocate the interaction between the church and posthumanism to how the practices of posthumanism and Christianity perform the bodies, affections and dispositions of each. Posthuman practices seeks to habituate: (1) A preference for informational patterns over material instantiation; (2) that consciousness and the self are extended and displaced rather than discrete and localized; (3) that the body is merely a tool, the original prosthesis we learn to manipulate and (4) that human life is organized such that it is seamless with intelligent machines. The Christian performance of embodied life, on the other hand, has Christ as template and, in the Eucharist, Christians are marked by offering, sacrifice and celebration in a community that affirms the integrity of our common incarnate life.

Keywords: *Alexander Schmemmann, Eucharist, incarnation, posthumanism, William Cavanaugh*

I. INTRODUCTION

The incarnation anchors Christianity and thus critically informs Christian bioethics. The glory of humanity—the final, real vision of what it truly is—is entirely dependent on and derivative of the God-man Christ. Theological anthropology is thoroughly Christological and Christ is consummately the incarnate one: God become human flesh. Christianity must simultaneously reject both Gnostic and Docetic views of material existence and acknowledge the given goodness of our incarnate life. This should not seem strange

since God affirms the goodness of creation long before taking on flesh in the incarnation. Christians not only affirm their embodied life as a given good but as productive and important to their life in discipleship to Christ. Just as Christ fed the hungry, cared for the poor, healed the blind and was resurrected to glorious embodied life, we too understand embodied life not as an obstacle to glory, but the path to it. The incarnation, thus, crucially impacts Christian ethics including Christian bioethics.

The Christian account of the human being as an incarnate creature presupposes that we are plastic and malleable, insofar that genuine growth and formation is possible. If the *telos* of the Christian life is discipleship to Jesus and the final aim is complete conformation to Him (Romans 8:29) how else could this be possible if we weren't able to change at the most fundamental level? Human nature is such that it can be molded and formed for without it we would not be able to enjoy redemption or even communion with God.¹ The danger of such malleability, as we will come to see, is that our formation can be molded by many different personal, political and social forces that have us engage in practices that might or might not be Christian at all. Hence, how we understand that formation in all its fleshly, embodied actions and what it is conformed to is paramount to understanding one of the foundational features of human existence and its grave import for the Christian life.

I argue here that a Christian incarnational response to all ideologies of posthumanism² must first recognize that what is at stake isn't just whether certain belief systems align. Most engagement between Christianity/the church³ and posthumanism focuses on cognitive (in)commensurability. Christian scholars have asked whether traditional accounts of, for example, theological anthropology, sin, deification, and/or eschatology cohere with the basic claims of posthumanism (Cole-Turner, 2011). For example, Christians have often taken issue with certain posthumanist beliefs that human nature has no intrinsic or even normative value (McKenny, 2013) or that accounts of human transcendence and transformation are at doctrinal odds with certain Christian accounts of deification (Burdett, 2015; Gallaher, 2019). Considering the cognitive coherence of Christian belief with posthumanism is certainly important, but this essay seeks to relocate reflection on how the constitutive practices of posthumanism and Christianity, respectively, form bodies, affections, and dispositions of each. In this way, Christianity and posthumanism meet not just in theory (the mind) but also in practice (the incarnate body). This performative unity of mind and body ultimately shapes a particular kind of individual. Taking the incarnation seriously here means not just reverting to how posthumanism fits or does not fit within the cognitive, doctrinal parameters of Christian belief. Rather, it is to understand the body as the site of Christian witness. Christians perform faithfully as the collective body of Christ, or the church. The church performs its witness in the midst of

other public, secularizing forces like posthumanism. Against the grain of the church's incarnational witness, such forces often witness against the body.

The essay begins with arguing that posthumanism needs to be taken with greater seriousness in bioethical circles today because of the way posthuman tenets and practices pervade public discourse and, as Brent Waters (2006) claims, increasingly operates in regenerative medicine. I then consider one of the most widely accepted characterizations of posthumanism defined by N. Katherine Hayles. Here I argue that despite her best efforts she still succumbs to cognitivist language when referring to the development of and defining the posthuman but will be the basis for my constructive account of posthuman practices later in the article. I then briefly give an account of Pierre Bourdieu's "performative anthropology" as a theoretical basis to ground the kind of interaction I have in mind when Christianity and posthumanism meet in performing the incarnate body. The final section lays claim to how the church performs the incarnate body of its constituents, which is itself the body of Christ. Here I focus specifically on Eucharistic practices and the way they stand often in opposition to the performed incarnate body of posthumanism.

II. POSTHUMANISM IN CULTURE AND MEDICINE

I often give academic and public presentations on the topic of human enhancement and posthumanism. New procedures and technologies that could be used for human enhancement stimulate the imagination, but what is often side-lined in these discussions are the long-term anthropological issues they raise. I often ask the audience: "Doesn't the very term 'enhancement' presuppose we know where we want the 'human being' to go? What are we enhancing towards? What is our goal in enhancement?" In other words, we cannot assess the bioethical issues of human enhancement without also addressing the inherent anthropological vision or ideology that mobilize them. We find such an ideology in posthumanism.

Brent Waters (2006) claims that posthumanism is much more pervasive today than we might surmise. People in positions of power are increasingly relying on an operative posthuman position from bioethical advisory boards (e.g., Nick Bostrom on the Presidential Bioethics Commission) to even candidates running for the American presidency (Zoltan Istvan). As Waters (2006, 1–45) claims in his celebrated *From Human to Posthuman*, late modern culture is typified by an increasing posthuman existence where technology, the doctrine of infinite progress, and plastic identities with inscrutable and wayward wills makeup our contemporary public landscape.

Aside from the cultural diffusion of posthuman identity amongst the late modern populace, posthumanist motivations are also visible in regenerative medicine. Advances in both cellular biology and genetics over the last several decades has led to an explosion of effective therapies that often have less

side effects than more traditional drug-based therapies. Waters (2009, 94–5) argues that if regenerative medicine reaches its potential, life expectancy will dramatically increase; this has captured the attention of many longevity specialists. Waters is concerned, however, that the advancement of regenerative medicine alongside a growing trend in certain medical circles that understands aging as a disease will lead to an all-out war on death (2009, 95). In the process, Waters perceives a profound shift in intended medical aims from the traditional role of care for the patient to complete cure, that is the complete elimination of the biological basis of suffering and even death itself. When medicine turns into an industry obsessed with death the human being becomes a mere means to an end—and that end is increasingly impacted by an operative posthumanism in culture and medicine (Waters, 2009, 95–114; Bishop 2012, 2016).

Because posthuman ideology is gaining traction in both culture⁴ and medical practice, it is imperative we understand the implications for embodied human lives. But our understanding of posthumanism itself has traditionally relied on giving an account of the associated beliefs leading us to falsely assume that the posthuman is constructed by cognitive assent to those beliefs. But is this a sufficient account of posthuman development? I argue it isn't, particularly in the next section. The danger for those in the church is that they unwittingly engage in posthuman development. Indeed, the posthuman belongs not to a distant future, but rather to our present and we support its advent not just through possible *assent to its beliefs*, but through *practices* that lay the groundwork for its construction.

III. COGNITIVIST CHARACTERIZATIONS OF THE POSTHUMAN

How do we know when the posthuman has arrived? How do we become posthuman? When one tries to imagine the posthuman the image often conjured is some future humanoid figure outfitted with all kinds of advanced technologies. It might be a bio-engineered creature where its genomic material has not only been sanitized of disorder and defect, but also gifted superior strength, mental acuity and physical stamina. Perhaps this posthuman has cyborg-like computer hardware embedded in its skin. Or you might think that this posthuman figure has no organic body at all and instead it is merely a consciousness downloaded into silicon-based hardware or running as some virtual avatar on a computer.

As N. Katherine Hayles (1999) claims, technological retrofitting of the human misses the real Copernican shift to the posthuman state. In fact, she argues, we already are posthuman. In her seminal book *How We Became Posthuman* she says:

. . . it is important to recognize that the construction of the posthuman does not require the subject to be a literal cyborg. Whether or not interventions have been made on the body, new models of subjectivity emerging from such fields as cognitive

science and artificial life imply that even a biologically unaltered *Homo sapiens* counts as posthuman. The defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components. (Hayles, 1999, 4)

In other words, mechanical components do not signal the turn to the posthuman. Rather she argues throughout her text it is our shifting conception of subjectivity that really marks how we became posthuman. In short, she claims posthuman subjectivity is defined by the following four tenets:

- (1) A preference for informational patterns over material instantiation.
- (2) Consciousness and the self are extended and displaced rather than discrete and localized.
- (3) The body is merely a tool, the original prosthesis we learn to manipulate.
- (4) Human life is organized such that it is seamless with intelligent machines. (Hayles 1999, 2–3)

For Hayles, we are posthuman because we see ourselves differently today than we did in ages past. We are no longer embodied creatures with monadic points of intention but part of a network of displaced wills adrift in the sea of identity and power. We don't know where you end and I begin.

Yet, I take issue with the way Hayles often portrays posthumanism in the text. Despite her overall emphasis on embodiment, the posthuman turn seems to be, for Hayles, largely a *cognitive* shift in our beliefs about human subjectivity. She uses terms throughout like “point of view” (Hayles, 1999, 2), “assumptions” (Hayles, 1999, 2, 3, 6, 12, 39, 87), “thinking” (Hayles 1999, 3, 6), “ideas” (Hayles 1999, 6, 22), “beliefs” (Hayles 1999, 1, 192) and “intellectual” (Hayles, 1999, 39) to describe posthumanism. However, we may ask: What if posthumanism is not exhausted by or even primarily defined by cognitive categories at all? What if the posthuman comes about by other means entirely? Indeed, Hayles' use of such cognitive diction to refer to posthumanism betrays her underlying argument. She maintains that we need to remember we are embodied creatures, not just mental thoughts floating in the ether, and yet her language militates against such memory (Hayles, 1999, 192–221; 283–92). Because we aren't just mental states but embodied creatures, we need to attend to the significance of embodiment. To do so, we need to focus on the movements of our bodies and how practice is an integral player in personhood, not just an extension of our cognitive faculties. Luckily, there is vast literature the last 50 years that addresses precisely what difference practice makes to how we understand personal formation.⁵

IV. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PERFORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY

Pierre Bourdieu, the 20th-century French sociologist, contributes to what might be called “a performative anthropology” and his work can provide a theoretical framework for how practices shape bodies and persons

and, hence, how Christianity and posthumanism interact incarnationally. Bourdieu's sociological insight grew out of a dissatisfaction with modern sociological method. Specifically, Bourdieu worried that the objectifying demeanor of social scientists eclipsed their ability to really get at the underlying motivations of people as social and performative beings (1977, 1–30; 1990, 25–9). What needed to be recovered in sociology was the way “natives”, that is, those who are the object of social study, inhabited and moved in their unique social, embodied and performative environments. In other words, the social scientist loses out on what it is like to be an individual from inside the social field of action: what it is like to perform as a socially acting being.

Bourdieu recommended a deeper reflection on the way our practices and habits form us. Central to Bourdieu's account is the concept of habitus. Habitus refers to our subjective dispositions that help us to construct, see and live in our world. These dispositions are often pre-reflective and enacted as embodied habits and traditions. Karl Maton states: “Simply put, habitus focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others” (2008, 52). These histories that we embody through a habitus connect us to the rest of the social world. A habitus has been impressed upon me through my relationships with other people and organizations. Hence, I am at home in the community that shares the common habitus that orients my movements within it. However, I am not entirely defined by the group. I still maintain a level of volition by negotiating and making strategies within the structured group to navigate through its parameters and cross-pressures. In this way, a habitus is more overarching than a worldview, with its echoes of an intellectualist focus. The habitus provides the practices, the dispositions and the parameters which underlie my experience of the world and go into shaping me personally.

Bourdieu's contentions relocate the interaction between posthumanism and the church away from competing cognitive claims or belief systems. Instead, he clarifies the way the practices of posthumanism and the church shape and define us. He helps us to see practices as the mediator between social groups, imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) and the performed members of that group. Our performative commitments, expressed through practice and action, define us more than our intellectual convictions.

Because we often overlook how our practices shape us, we need to attend to them even more than the explicit intellectual beliefs we hold. For, we may actually find that we are engaged in a kind of “performative syncretism”. We might participate unknowingly in all kinds of practices that serve a plurality of ideologies. In a sense, if we engage in “performative syncretism” we are, to use the biblical imagery, formed by different potters (Isaiah 64:8) with different intentions and aims. Therefore, we need to recognize these practices as powerful, motivating crucibles of formation rather than just passive and

harmless extensions of prior cognitive belief. If/when we do so, we might find we are becoming posthuman not via assent to its ideological tenets but through its corresponding practices.

V. PRACTICE AND FORMATION IN POSTHUMANISM

This invites the question: What are these practices that help to form the posthuman? We will take Hayles' four tenets of posthumanism outlined earlier as a point of reference. First, the posthuman condition is defined as a preference for informational patterns over material instantiation. What practices both elucidate and support a preference for informational patterns over material instantiation? Wherever I am in public, I see people staring at their smart phones rather than talking to or even acknowledging one another. Similarly, when walking in parks I see people with headphones, thus revealing their preference for their music to the sounds of nature. We are surrounded by our personal bubbles of virtual, informational networks and turn to them when in public. They are the way in which we experience and mediate the world and thus highlight our preference for informational patterns to genuine materiality.

Two pictures clearly manifest this posthuman practice. The first picture came from NBC several years ago and it shows Saint Peter's Square in Rome during the institution of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005 and Pope Francis in 2013 (Taylor, 2013). The difference between the two photos is the presence of thousands of illuminated screens in 2013, absent in 2005, showing the spectators taking pictures of the pope with their smartphones and tablets. It is astounding that this practice of taking pictures with our devices in public has taken off in less than a decade. On such a momentous occasion, those faithful in the crowd preferred to live the experience through their phones. It really does show how we experience the world through informational mediums rather than the primary material reality.⁶ The second picture is more abstract and is credited to the street artist Banksy. Art critics titled the image in question "Mobile Lovers" and in it we see two lovers embracing but instead of being lost in the moment both are instead staring at their illuminated mobile phones (Vincent, 2014). Here we see Banksy calling attention to our preference for virtual networks outside of just public settings to some of our most intimate moments. It is a profound picture because it strikes to the heart of some of our most illuminating posthuman practices today. Who would deny taking their phone or tablet with them to bed, ignoring their spouse and loved ones in the process? Who has missed an important moment in the life of their children because they were too busy checking their Twitter feed? We engage in many practices today that help to form the posthuman preference for informational patterns over material instantiation.

The second tenet of posthumanism refers to consciousness and the self as extended and displaced rather than discrete and localized. What habits inculcate the extended and displaced self? In ages past material mementos acted as the means by which we were extended in the world (Gell, 1998, 99–104; Pattison, 2007, 171–6). Of course, we still recognize the power and personal presence conveyed by something like an icon or a family heirloom, but today this presence and extension of ourselves is much more sophisticated. Consider how seamlessly we extend our faculties and presence through things like teleconference communications such as Skype and Facetime. My nieces and nephews would not know me as well as they do without Skype or Facetime. I depend upon such technologies to convey my image and face to them. My personhood is extruded through this virtual medium and I simultaneously exist where I am embodied presently and in their living room. We find something similar in less real-time virtual activities like social media, creation of avatars and other online personas. We convey ourselves to others through Facebook profiles, Twitter feeds and Instagram photos. What is interesting is that something like identity theft on the internet acknowledges the implicit connection between who we are—our identities and personhood—with what extends beyond ourselves and our productions. So, while an extended self is certainly not new in our information age, it is certainly more powerful, integrated, and far-reaching.

The third feature of posthumanism is the treatment of the body as the original prosthetic open to fundamental manipulation and thereby extension. The interface between the human body and artifacts, such as can be found with relatively benign examples like clothing or spectacles, has become increasingly blurred such that the body itself is viewed as just a prosthetic and, hence, can be altered. Associated activities and practices with this aspect of posthumanism include the installation of microchips under one's skin or the complex practice of "brain hacking". A growing section of the population have taken to implanting RFID (radio-frequency identification) microchips under their skin and people such as Kevin Warwick, Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Coventry University, have famously used them to control doors, lights and other electronic devices in their proximity, and Warwick himself even controlled a robotic arm thousands of miles away via the internet using these implanted electronics (Macaulay, 2017). Still others engage in "brain hacking", a procedure whereby mild electrical current is applied to targeted sections of the brain to enhance certain capabilities like increased focus (Konnikova, 2015). All these practices and others like them reveal that we already engage in this third area of posthuman practice: treating the body as a prosthetic.

Finally, recall that Hayles defines the posthuman state as the seamless organization of human life with intelligent machines. Here it is easy to see how our practices align with this tenet. How many of us have used SIRI to schedule a meeting, voice a reminder, or call a friend? We may have even spoken to a bot on the phone to get our latest bank balance. What

is important is how these intelligent machines have worked their way into our ordinary lives so that they are very much a part of our daily routines in society. When computers were first invented half century ago scientists and engineers were the only ones who used these “intelligent machines” and they often took up an entire room. That all changed in the 1990s with Bill Gates’ vision to put a personal computer in every home. Now I can curl up with a cup of coffee and my tablet on the couch. This is the posthuman story that we practice every day: intelligent machines really are seamless with our human lives.

Through these practices we have contributed to our posthuman state. Because our practices shape us, form us and define us they are not benign when it comes to enacting the posthuman. We may not assent to posthuman ideology and yet live posthuman lives.

VI. EUCHARISTIC PRACTICE AND FORMATION IN THE CHURCH

Focusing incarnational personhood and personal transformation around practices, rather than beliefs, is surely not new for the church. From the Desert Fathers to John Wesley, the focus on spiritual disciplines, ascetic practices and personal holiness help us conform to the image and likeness of God in Christ. They show us the power our practices have in forming us.

Over the last century, in particular, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the importance of Christian practice to the faith and the way it forms who we are at the most fundamental level—even in places that are purported to be the domain of just intellectual belief. For instance, consider the Christian creeds. One might think that the resuscitation of the creeds is primarily about personal intellectual assent; it is about aligning our cognitive beliefs with inherited doctrines. The near-universal practice of creedal resuscitation tells us something different, however, about its formative role as it is recited and performed in the context of worship. The cognitive elements in the creed cannot be separated from its place in practice and worship (Pelikan, 2006, 158–85). Many Christian denominations express this important pairing when they claim in the oft-cited phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of praying is the law of believing). As James K. Smith (2009, 34) paraphrases “we pray *before* we believe, we worship *before* we know—or rather we worship *in order to* know.” What Smith refers to here is the way our worship in the church has always been the bedrock for our beliefs. The development of doctrine in the first three centuries of the church grew out of the worship and practices of the early Christians (cf. Philemon 2:5–11 and Romans 16:25–27). If you ask a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church where their beliefs reside they will point you to their worship and liturgy. They have no distinct location of their beliefs other than what they perform and practice in the church every Sabbath and every other day of the week. For the Christian, worship and belief are inseparable.⁷

Aside from acknowledging the way belief and practice are irrevocably entwined in the church, it is clear that the church is the place where personal and communal formation occurs. Alexander Schmemmann (1965, 189) puts it this way: “. . . the true spirit and meaning of liturgy, [is] as an all-embracing *vision of life*, including heaven and earth, time and eternity, spirit and matter and as the *power* of that vision to transform our lives.” The church anticipates the final consummation of the coming kingdom of God and through the sacraments and communal worship are formed in coherence with Christ who images this kingdom. The church, as the body of Christ, is the crucible of *metanoia* where the entirety of oneself—intellectual, moral, spiritual, affectional—is conformed to Christ. The church is the performative center of communal and personal transformation.

Indeed, many practices in the church could be levied to highlight how it is the crucible of formation for its members: prayer, fasting, *lectio divina* or indeed any other spiritual/ascetic disciplines. But I will focus on just one particular practice, the Eucharist, for it locates this transformative presence precisely and robustly. For, as William Cavanaugh (1998, 235) asserts in his groundbreaking text *Torture and Eucharist*, “the church does not simply perform the Eucharist; the Eucharist performs the church.” In many ways he hearkens to an insight Henri de Lubac (2013, 88) asserted was the basis of the early church’s ecclesiology: “Nourished by the body and blood of the Savior, his faithful people thus all drink ‘of the one Spirit’, who truly makes them into one single body. Literally speaking, therefore, the Eucharist makes the Church.”

In agreement with both Cavanaugh and de Lubac, I claim that the Eucharist can provide an important space and habitus which, at most, runs counter to the technological organization of posthuman practices or, at least, provides an important corrective to it. Indeed, I will explore how the Eucharist performs the church and its individual members in contrast to the posthuman, technological organization of bodies. While I am aware that Eucharistic theology and practices can differ across the Christian denomination spectrum I will focus on those elements of the Eucharist that are as ecumenical as possible and that respond most directly to posthuman practices.

First, the Eucharist unites a gathered community in real space. Such gathering avoids the fragmentation and the individualization that can occur because of virtual networks and the preference for “informational patterns over material instantiation” (see 1 and 2 above). As Schmemmann notes:

. . . from the very beginning the eucharist was a manifestation and realization of the unity of the new people of God, gathered by Christ and in Christ. We need to be thoroughly aware that we come to the temple not for individual prayer but to *assemble together as the Church*, and the visible temple itself signifies and is but an image of the temple not made by hands. (1988a, 22–3)

The Eucharist is characterized as a con-celebration where the laity serve as much in the action and gathering of the assembly as the clergy. In fact, the laity in the early church signified the presence of the assembly prior to the clergy entering the space of the liturgical action itself (Schmemmann, 1988a, 14–5). Regrettably, the focal point of the Eucharist in the West has become the sacramental elements themselves and the mystery that surrounds them (Cavanaugh 1998, 212–3). Yet, Schmemmann makes it clear that the gathering of the community is, and was originally, prior to the action performed with the sacramental elements. As he points out, “all evidence we possess points to the fact that the *gathering* or *assembly* (σύναξις) was always considered the first and basic act of the eucharist” (Schmemmann, 1988a, 15). The Eucharist as a performance would not be possible without a whole church defined by its communal, Eucharistic action. The Eucharist becomes the ecclesiological, embodied action of those who gather and sup on the bread and the wine. These relations in the Eucharistic community are not virtually enacted through created, electronic means for the intended purpose of fulfilling an agent’s desire. Rather, what characterizes this gathered community is mutual submission to one another in authentic relationships that are held together in real, material space.

The imbibing of the wine and the consumption of the bread does not magically entail forgiveness of sins, but it is an act of remembrance of the One who has forgiven sins and who calls us to right relationship with each other prior to partaking (cf. Mathew 5:23–26 and Cavanaugh (1998, 239)). In these liturgical actions one is made aware that a Eucharistic ecclesiology necessitates mutual submission “one to another” (Ephesians 5:21–25) which signifies both the importance of unity in the Eucharist and the requisite demeanor of its constitutive members. Furthermore, the Eucharistic community is conceived of in spatial, performative action and in concrete, liturgical movements. In this way, the Eucharist is a counter-practice or corrective to disembodied and autonomous posthuman performance.

The Eucharist opposes posthuman technological performance through privileging embodied offering, giving and celebration over against manipulation and control (contra 3 above). Schmemmann (1988a, 101) states:

Bread and wine. By bringing these humble human gifts—our earthly food and drink—and placing them on the altar, we perform, often without thinking it, that most ancient, primordial rite that from the first day of human history constituted the core of every religion: we offer a sacrifice to God.⁸

Before one receives the sacramental elements for consumption they are blessed and offered to God on the altar. As the quotation suggests, the Eucharist recalls the origins of its movements in the sacrificial cult of the Jewish people. Since the beginning of the Judeo-Christian religions the sacrifice or offering has been central to its worship and practice. For in this Eucharistic recollection one remembers Christ’s final sacrifice for humanity’s salvation. Likewise, one is to reflect this sacrificial demeanor towards

others—even by laying down one’s life (John 15:13). This imperative extends beyond the inward constituents of the church formed through the Eucharist. For, as Cavanaugh (1998, 232) contends, “the church is most properly the church when it exists as gift and sustenance for others.” Indeed, the Eucharist in the early church encapsulated the gifts of all the people which were meant to sustain those outside of the church such as the poor, widows and orphans in addition to those inside the church. In this way, the Eucharist is entirely defined by its sacrificial nature to those in and outside of the church.

Rather than manipulating bodies for greater satisfaction, the Eucharist performs ecclesial bodies that celebrate communally. Indeed, Albert Borgmann (2003, 35–64) has suggested a response to the technological situation in what he calls “communities of celebration”. As the phrase suggests, the fulcrum of the community centers on celebration. Such is the case with the Eucharistic community that celebrates redemption and life in the church. Schmemmann (1988b, 25) even refers to the liturgical act as “the very sacrament of joy”. This joy and celebration of embodied participation in the church, even in suffering, is contrasted with the bodily manipulation of posthuman practice.

A particular incarnate relation typifies the Eucharistic body that affirms its embodied nature, integrity and integration with the head of the church, that is Christ (Colossians 1:18). One’s body plays an active role in the Eucharistic action through the movement of the body in the liturgical rite. One is called from one’s place amidst the laity and invited to move towards the altar, to kneel and to consume Christ: the action is steeped in the spatiality of the body. One’s bodily person is called to participate and celebrate with and amidst other bodies. But, the key performative action of the Eucharist is the actual drinking of Christ’s blood and the eating of His flesh. In this movement, His body becomes part of ours and our body becomes part of His. We are drawn into his incarnate body as the church when we celebrate the Eucharist. Our conformation to Christ is the embodied locus of the Eucharistic act.

Indeed, just as the elements sustain the soul of the person so also is it sustenance for the body. There is parallel emphasis on the bodily/physical notion of the person partaking in the Eucharist in as much as a spiritual/cognitive emphasis. This embodied component of the Eucharist is important for Cavanaugh’s overarching thesis in *Torture and Eucharist*: a purely mystical interpretation of the Eucharist lay at the heart of the Chilean churches refusal to acknowledge its role in stopping torture and violence under the Pinochet regime in the late 20th century (1998, 151–202). The Chilean church had neither the doctrinal nor sacramental resources to resist the state’s violence towards its members because it had abandoned the body as an important component of sacramental life. The Eucharistic performance of bodies reaffirms the integrity and materiality of bodies in communion with others and with God. The Eucharist, as a consummately Christian and embodied

practice, highlights the poverty of the posthuman instrumental body that is displaced and informational rather than material, integrous and whole.

VII. CONCLUSION

Taking the incarnation seriously in the context of bioethics and posthumanism means more than intellectual reconciliation of divergent positions. Instead it means realizing that the incarnate body is where each performs, or “practices,” the body in specific ways. On the one hand, the posthuman performance of incarnate life seeks to habituate: (1) A preference for informational patterns over material instantiation; (2) that consciousness and the self are extended and displaced rather than discrete and localized; (3) that the body is merely a tool, the original prosthesis we learn to manipulate and (4) that human life is organized such that it is seamless with intelligent machines. On the other hand, the Christian performance of embodied life has Christ as template and, as we have seen with the Eucharist, provides a counter-practice or corrective to the detrimental performance of posthuman existence. Christian embodiment in the Eucharist focuses on communal life marked by offering, sacrifice and celebration. Ecclesial practices such as the Eucharist affirm the integrity of our incarnate life as we are drawn into the broken yet glorious body of Christ who makes all things new. Indeed, Christ performs His church to be an incarnate witness to others who bears the very mark of His own image. At the end of all things, when Christ is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28), we are invited into that Great Performance, the Holy Trinity, which is the very well-spring of all existence and out of which all is performed (Von Balthasar, 1998).

NOTES

1. Kathryn Tanner is a contemporary theologian that elevates the very plastic nature of humanity as being what is most distinctive about it amongst other creatures. According to Tanner, human beings are more plastic, expandable, and open-ended than any other creature and this is the true foundation of the image of God. See Tanner (2010, 41–54).

2. I describe and define posthumanism in more detail in the section entitled “Practice and Formation in Posthumanism”. For now, I understand posthumanism to refer to a cluster of related ideologies and practices, as we will come to see, that maintain the human being/condition is not something to safeguard (if it ever existed according to certain theorists like Donna Haraway (1991)) but should endeavor to realize a posthuman state. Often the means for reaching such a state, particularly for the transhumanist variety of posthumanism, includes utilizing GRIN technologies (genetic, robotic, information, and nanotechnology) for human enhancement purposes. Human enhancement is defined by Allen Buchanan (2011, 5) as “an intervention—a human action of any kind—that improves some capacity (or characteristic) that normal human beings ordinarily have or, more radically, that produces a new one.” For a greater elucidation of the variety of posthumanisms and how they relate to each other and human enhancement see Burdett and Lorrimar (2019), Thweatt-Bates (2012, 1–15). Much of my commentary throughout this article problematizes overly-cognitivist definitions and characterizations of all posthuman discourse.

3. When I refer to the church throughout this essay I mean the universal church that belongs to the headship of Christ and confesses the triune God in the Nicene Creed. As such I have no particular confession or denomination in mind but rather seek to be as ecumenical as possible in my claims regarding the church.

4. For more on these pervasive posthuman beliefs in contemporary culture see [Burdett \(2014, 15–20\)](#).

5. Of course, I could just as easily use work by Aquinas, Ravaisson, Mauss or Merleau-Ponty to provide such a framework but Bourdieu is certainly one of the most important figures in recent history to define and utilize extensively a “performative anthropology”.

6. For greater analysis of how operative the virtual is today in masking the real and our continued preference for the virtual see [Baudrillard \(1994\)](#), [Zizek \(2012\)](#), and [Virilio \(2007\)](#).

7. For an excellent modern appraisal of how doctrine does more than just regulate belief but instead has vast impact on our entire embodied lives see [Zahl \(2015\)](#).

8. It should be noted that by “we offer . . .” [Schmemmann \(1988a, 104–5\)](#) means the church participates in the sacrifice and offering of Christ’s first offering on the cross. Indeed, we offer with Christ insofar as the church is Christ’s body.

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