Opinion
Guest Voices



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In her prescient 2013 book *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*, Franciscan sister and theologian Ilia Delio argues that the digital age has produced a world in which the body is both idol and object. The body has become the ultimate site of meaning, yet its significance has been reduced to a marketplace good. Delio writes, "The need to find a new body and new personal identity is becoming more urgent in a culture of consumerism in which the primary commodity is the human person."

Twelve years later, the quest for bodily perfection has intensified. We carry our culture's beauty standards with us at every moment. Instagram. TikTok. Snapchat. Twitter. These platforms feature highly curated images and videos of idealized body types. Fitspiration. Thinspiration. Viral trends like "What I eat in a day" and "glow-ups." The content is endless, the feed bottomless.

Delio contends that the "cyborgization" of our culture means that our devices have become an "exoskeletal self." This exoskeletal self allows us to summon information about almost anything within minutes and communicate over vast distances in a matter of seconds. The ostensible omniscience and omnipresence our technology offers us reflect the primordial human drive to "be like God" (Genesis 3:5). But this digital divinization has come at an existential cost.

Our devices divorce us from the sacred immediacy of the present. Noise-canceling headphones allow us to move through the world in individualized auditory bubbles. More and more, our eyes are cast downward in devotion to our screens. We text mid-stride, scroll through our feeds or catch up on emails, thumbs flicking with muscle memory precision. We have become strangers to ourselves and each other. As Delio writes, "The 'I-Thou' relationship has mutated into an 'I-phone' relationship."

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Contemporary culture's eclipse of the body has compelling implications for how we read the Bible. "But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I

was naked; and I hid myself' " (Genesis 3:9-10). In our cyborg age, these verses describe how we have "fallen" from our embodied existence. As with our postlapsarian parents, we relate to the body as other, as a source of shame and lack. "Nakedness" might be read as our culture's hyper-consciousness about bodily presentation and our desire to conceal our physical "flaws." As the line between digital and dimensional reality becomes blurry, "Where are you?" might be the essential question of our time.

Genesis might also suggest a connection between our bodily estrangement, the climate crisis and the deeper meaning of Pope John Paul II"s "ecological conversion ." In Genesis 2, we learn that God shaped us from the "dust of the ground." Humanity and earth are one. Thus, our alienation extends beyond our own bodies to the greater corporeal matrix that is our Earth. As Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*: "We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." In this context, ecological conversion begins with a turning back to the body as the microcosm of the living, breathing planet. To save the Earth is to save the self.

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This understanding of original sin sheds fresh light on Jesus' salvific work in the New Testament. The Incarnation is the repairing of broken relations with the body: human and planetary. Jesus' teachings employ the diction of the Earth: mustard seed, moth, vine, water, wind, lily, soil, stone and sparrow. Key moments of His ministry occur outside: He receives the Holy Spirit in the Jordan, is transfigured on a mountain top, and spends His final hours in a garden.

Jesus' communion with the planet mirrors the closeness He demonstrates in the touch He offers a leper, a crippled woman, Jairus' daughter and, most remarkably, the man in Mark 7: "They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened' "(Mark 7:32-34).

These moments of encounter invite us to put down our devices and "be opened" to the present moment. "Ephphatha" is the call of our time: to see, to hear, to touch, to

taste, to be attentive to God, self, neighbor and Earth.