On a first reading, this work can be classified as of prime importance for the understanding of the Old Testament culture and anthropology and the environment of originating Christianities. And as such it must become part of the collection that opens up new doors for the analysis of biblical texts. I believe that *Symbolism of the Body in the Bible* should be considered as material for consultation along with the great work by Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*. As a matter of fact, this work can be considered as being an evaluation and complement, as it gives new contributions towards the understanding of the body in the Bible and Semitic culture.

Hence in the long introduction, the authors present us with some perspectives and approaches to biblical anthropology.

Using as reference the expression image of God in Gn 1, 26-27 and the full understanding of the Christian tradition, we come up against different lines of interpretation: the resemblance with the tomistic-agostinian tradition, the mysticism of Gregory of Nissan, the modern day sociology and present day theology which, to a certain extent, ventures to become unfastened from speculation and dogmatic control. From which arises the major question of what it means to be human in the field of anthropological theology. We find a first attempt at an answer in the Jewish teachings on Adam which presents him as being the original human being and at the same time as the one who was responsible for sin. It is in this framework that the possibility of free will is to be found. Other attempts appear in the formation of the dialectic between Adam and Christ in the Christian tradition, in the Gnostic speculations and in the presentation of the human being in the mediation between God and the devil present in the Islamic tradition. In the sphere of theology and philosophy the authors point in the direction of the contributions given by Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanual Lévinas for the understanding of the body in the philosophy of liberation perspective. Hence the whole dimension of corporeality of men and women as sacrament, liberation dimension and characteristic of a church committed to an ecclesial and theological experience in Latin America.

We find another attempt at an answer to what it means to be human in the outline of anthropology of the Old Testament. Here the authors point towards the important contribution given by Hans Walter Wolff and which should be complemented by approaches which surpass an andocentric anthropology. The authors, as well as reinforcing the contributions given by Wolff and the objections raised

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by James Barr for a Biblical anthropology, strive to present the lacunas present in these analyses so as to develop a reading of the body in the Bible in a wider and more open fashion. In that which refers to the anthropology developed by Wolff, the authors point out three examples of the notion of the body in the Hebrew tradition which are missing from his presentation of his Old Testament anthropology: the theology of the eye, the symbolism of the womb to ground the being human and sexuality. As the authors themselves affirm: “we do not wish to take the credit away from Wolff but rather draw attention to the limitations and extrapolations which the methods possess”. On the other hand, the criticism and objections raised by the semantic exegesis by James Barr need to be worked on more in that which refers to the relevance of the masculine and feminine gender of a word and its semantic construction; as well as avoiding the pitfalls of a purely linguistic reading and going in search of an exegesis that strives to quote and carefully situate the biblical texts. Finally, the authors point out the feminist perspectives of a biblical anthropology in the overcoming of auto-centrism.

An interesting aspect pointed out by the authors in the introduction deals with the biblical spirituality of the body moving from a description of the body to a dimension of its beauty and source of prayer (in the perspective as pointed out by the Canticle of Canticles and the Book of Psalms) to its affirmation as the centre of the celebration of the bread, temple of God and space of ecclesiality according to the Pauline affirmation.

It is worth stressing the presentation of the notions of the body in the Bible as images accompanied by their respective notes and the wealth of biblical quotations to help the reader situate the text. As well as this we find at the end of the book, in the form of a supplement, the important words worked on in the book and their respective correlation to the human body.

Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli bring the reader on a trip through the human body and at the same time lead one through the network of meanings found in the Semitic culture. This is the road proposed by the authors in the ten chapters of this beautiful biblical anthropology.

The first chapter treats the heart as the central, interior idea of the human body, and so the Bible says that God knows very well the interior of the human being. The leb can be replenished with fear, be peaceful, dejected or even arrogant, it can dearly want something and can rejoice. It is also the seat of reason and understanding, secret plans, reflection and decision. Thus, the absence of the heart implies the loss of good-sense. It is the folly found in the prophetic language as well as in the teachings and instructions of the wise men.

The throat (nefesh) is the body organ treated in chapter two. It is the visible, avid and audible throat. Thus it becomes the symbol of the wishful, wanting person, or in other words, it is the vital force that makes the person a being thirsty for life. From here to the understanding of the nefesh as the soul is a long road, which according to the authors was responsible for many reductionisms and misunderstandings, as the notions coming from Greek philosophy remained tied to the concept. The idea of the soul as found in Greek philosophy cannot be compared with the Hebrew representation of nefesh.

The third chapter which deals with the stomach (the abdominal region) as the seismograph of ones sentiments. The primordial concept is the womb (rechem), which is the seat of strong sentimental movements. Thus resulting in the concept of compassion and mercy attributed to the image of a compassionate merciful God.
A theme dear to the Hebrew tradition and of prime importance contributing to the formation of a feminine maternal feature of God.

The head which represents the whole human person, along with the face, the hair, the neck, has a very special significance. It can be representative of leadership and power with connotations of virility and sensuality in the hair going as far as the rage and anger represented by the nose. These various organs and their meaning are the subject matter of chapter four. However it is in the fifth and sixth chapters that the authors deal with the matter of indicating their counterparts in Hans Walter Wolff’s anthropology, when referring to the eyes and the ears as fully rich, integrated parts for the development of the Old-Testament biblical theology. Hearing and seeing are also fundamental for the understanding of the role of prophecy and wisdom and, above all, in the actions of Jesus of Nazareth.

From the mouth comes the connection with the word and praise; from the hands, the aspect of gesture, the act of creation and power; from the feet comes the notion of the way and belonging. The God of the Bible is a God with hands and feet, a God who acts powerfully through history, who suffers with his people, who is concrete and can be touched – even if only the feet. These body parts with their theological nuances are all dealt with from chapter seven through to chapter nine.

The last chapter comes to grips with the concept of basar, flesh, referring to the body as a whole and which is to become the symbol of the humanity so desired by God and an expression of life. The human person is flesh – while alive, a throat thirsty for life; the flesh is jovial, winged, moved and lead by vital forces. The First Testament describes these vital forces using the word ruach. Ruach the living breath which clicks into motion when the hungry finally have access to food and the thirsty drink (! Samuel 30,12; Judges 15,19), or yet, with some good news, ignites the desire to live, which may be on the ground, dejected or extinct (Gn 45,57).

Here we have an efficient instrument for the study of the Bible, for the understanding of the body and the Semitic culture and, above all, to care for the body taking into consideration respect for the rights of men, women and children and their spirituality. A fruitful reading and the formation of valuable reflections is what can be expected from the community workers, the pastoral activities and the churches.