

Research Paper Summary

The century we are living in brings forth another environment, characterized by the decline of the human value and the authorities' claim to obedience under the principle of democracy, plus the electronic enslavement towards technology. Paradoxically, in a consumerist and always changing society, the man is not happy. He is often tired and confused, almost bored with everything around him, determined and tight-laced in his own technical creations. The value of existence exceeds in importance the life lived beautifully, sincerely and deeply joyful. The contemporary man is still looking for himself, either searching the depths of the universe or deepening in painstaking laboratory experimental analysis; the man, an eternal enamored of himself, is no longer interested in pleasing God. The commandment of loving your neighbor and the meaning of the idea of holiness or godliness appear to be behind the times and totally obsolete in the context of a super-consumerist society.

According to the Orthodox spirituality in Christ, people love before they meet or see. Or, the other for the contemporary man is not „the neighbor” anymore. The neighbor is just another, even an enemy. Invisible walls, vanities and often brutal jealousies rise with fierceness and avidity, altering any trace of sensitivity and beauty. The man no longer recognizes God in the other, because he lost Him inside. God has no place in the man.

The body preeminence can be easily seen nowadays at all levels of the mundane life, a presence in force, following the wider interest of the spirit of this world, which is „the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (I *In* 2, 16). Although the man was always interested in his body, an exacerbation of the body paradigm is experienced more than ever in the present day at the expense of the soul, the body being approached from many perspectives: from the subject of scientific, philosophical or medical research, up to trading it as a source for achieving pleasure. All and sundry is interested in the body: ordinary people or scientists, young or old, male or female; the whole society is subordinate to the body. Therefore, the human body is an almost exclusively carnal research object these days, and its value is not due to the presence of God in him, but rather to His absence. Simply put, the body is reduced to a corpse, a carcass, a shell. The secular society¹ turns even the blissful veneration of the saints' bodies by pilgrims in a trade event. However, despised or adored, healthy or sick, handsome or ungraceful, the body attracts every man's attention. No one

¹ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. N. Achimescu, „Secularismul ca atitudine spirituală care-L ignoră pe Dumnezeu”, in *Teologia*, no. 4, year VIII, (2004), p. 19.

can live being indifferent to his body. And because it is so interesting, it will likely remain a subject of contradictions² and a constantly challenging topic.

We have noticed in recent years that the body issue is addressed somewhat with „complicity” from multiple perspectives (anthropology, sociology, philosophy, history, art, media, political science, etc.), sometimes avoiding the potential which the theology has to offer in this respect³. Moreover, there is now an obvious concern for anthropology, for the human body, a true invasion of the body. These actions fall into the so-called *anthropologies of the present*, which include cultural anthropologies: ethnological, historical, sociological, etc. Their development keeps pace with the progress that neuroscience, cybernetics and sociobiology experience in the present day. If classical anthropologies still have a trace of spirit or soul in their research subject, the cultural ones only limit themselves within the body and its social dimension.

The modern body care, the offensive over the body draws, in its turn, an imaginary of practices that turn the body into welfare (form), pleasant appearance (body building, cosmetics, diet, and so on, by changing the ideal beauty), or trained for risk and performance (climbing, adventure, etc.)⁴. Neither literature has avoided the generous issue of the body. Every week two new books referring to the body appear in bookstores⁵. Whether it is eroticized literature, such as the French or Spanish space, whether it emphasizes the sensuality and sexual pathological cases, as some native authors like Ioana Baetica, Ionut Chiva, Claudia Golea do, but not outlining an eroticized literature itself; in all these cases, the corporal lost its divine essence and went deeper in a materialism that fails to appreciate the human body.

Many challenges that the modern man has to face in this society of exertion require from him a variety of ways of understanding the human, a genuine phenomenology of the body at a large scale. They have marked the history of research on the subject of the body’s transformations, which are reflected by determining and influencing each other in a very rich imaginary of corporality and have installed an authentic culture of the corpse nowadays, based on pleasure and entertainment, in the age of Facebook and Internet, where the virtual world tends to become the single reality.

² Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului în Ortodoxie*, translation by Antonia Nun, Basilica Publishing House of Romanian Patriarchy, Bucharest, 2010 p. 9.

³ Laura Grünberg (coord.), *Introducere în sociologia corpului. Teme, perspective și experiențe întrupate*, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2010, p. 12.

⁴ David Le Breton, *Antropologia corpului și modernitatea*, Translation by Doina Lică, Amarcord Publishing House, Timișoara, 2002, p. 7.

⁵ Ioan Petru Culianu, *Jocurile minții. Istoria ideilor, teoria culturii, epistemologie*, Edited by Mona Antohi and Sorin Antohi, Introductory Study by Sorin Antohi, Translation by Mona Antohi, Sorin Antohi, Claudia Dumitriu, Dan Petrescu, Catrinel Plesu, Corina Popescu, Anca Vaidesegan, Polirom Publishing House, Iasi, 2012, p. 293.

It can be said that the modern man is isolated and lonely in the life of his own body and his body became the only god, being placed carefully on the „pedestal and turned into one of the nowadays monuments”⁶.

This latter aspect requires to be expanded. The man in our days, especially in the western area, is alienated from himself and from the others. The specifically Christian belief affirming that the man is connected with the people and the whole cosmos remained somehow an artifact of the medieval history, which the modern man seeks to separate from. The incarnation of the Word, a major event of spiritual life and foundation for any Christian, has a reverse almost fatal in the present day: the un-human incarnation, running away from one's body. The body is a remainder⁷ which remembers its mission, since the Word of God dressed it with this. The civilized man today wants to forget that he has a body, and therefore he ignores or hates it. Denying it the aura and the rich spiritual value, it rejects the presence and existence of God in man.

As it is common knowledge, there is a widespread practice in the history of Church that when different challenges distract the human mind and sight from the right, saving teaching, this has to be repeated, thoroughly renewed and firmly reaffirmed. That is how the idea of this research theme entitled *The value of the human body in the Orthodox spirituality* was born.

At a first glance, the theme seems a „dèjà vu”. (Who does not know enough about the body? Or what else can be said about the body, as long as the teaching of faith is ultimately expressed and explained?). However, the present research sought more objectives to achieve the final purpose of showing to the contemporary man the timeliness of the doctrine of the Holy Fathers on the body. Therefore we tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the basic stances of the body in the man's mentality and thinking nowadays?
2. In this context, do the theology and especially Orthodox spirituality have the means of providing today a viable speech to other sciences dealing with man and especially the body?
3. How can the teaching of the Holy Fathers on the body be known, appreciated and attractive in the context of the existing world?

The potential contributions of such research fall on the need of the man today to rediscover the body, using the Christological deepening of patristic anthropology, according to the spirituality of our times. Another mission is the renewal of the theological discourse on the human body and, in general, the importance of authentic living in Church's sacramental and liturgical space, following the dynamic tradition of the Church. Returning to the sources is needed, especially today.

⁶ Aurel Codoban, *Imperiul comunicării. Corp, imagine, relationare*, Idea Design&Print, Cluj, 2011, p. 7.

⁷ Florin Crâsmăreanu, „De la «corpul dat» la «corpul inventat»”, in the volume George Bondor (editor), *Sensuri ale corpului*, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Publishing House, Iasi, 2011, pp. 89-90.

In addition, the spirituality can help to rediscover the sublime values of the human, for renewing the Patristic Orthodoxy and the human life's sacredness, for promoting self-consciousness, including the recovery of the bond between the public life and the personally practiced orthodoxy. Christians today have to live the Christian life convincingly. Orthodox spirituality is required to amplify and promote the teaching of the Church, the universality of salvation in Christ, speaking to all people, regardless of their social, economic, cultural, political, racial status.

The paper was developed following the drafting stages of a PhD scientific research. The methodology includes besides the actual steps of scientific writing, a specific theological methodical research. Unfortunately, there is no generally-available method that can be applied invariably at all sciences. If we restrict only to the scientific space of Theology, we cannot speak of a research method that is recommended to all theological disciplines without specific nuances. Regarding the suitable method for research in the field of spirituality as a teaching discipline, more methodological issues can be considered. The method mainly has a twofold character. Firstly, we will use the scientific reasoning to present the teaching of the Fathers on the human body, while the interpretation of the patristic theology will respect the same principles of biblical hermeneutics, without overlooking the context in which the Fathers lived and interpreted the Scripture. In the theological space, the attempts specific to patristic are similar to those of the History of dogma formulation, the Liturgy and pastoral Theology. Unlike history, even the Church history, the Theology scientific argumentation requires theological perspective, the charisma of Theology.

Secondly, the profound implications of various concepts related to the body require a general approach in specific terms of systematic theology. From this point of view, the theme is particularly attractive as it involves clear settlement, nearly adjoining the fruits of spiritual thinking and the human culture on the body, while, on the other hand emphasizing the factors that have determined and marked the evolution of multiple semantic transformations. The plurality, implications and almost natural ambivalence of the various metaphors of the body in the Orthodox spirituality cannot be established only using the research methods specific to systematic theology, from which the subject is an integral part.

Clearly, the present thesis has not exhausted the diversity of body images in the contemporary human thinking. The theme is called upon to clarify the objectivity of multiplying the idea of corporality in the area of the man's divergent thinking nowadays. Nonetheless, we outlined in a more didactic approach through examples and bibliographic explanations the deep symbolism that the human body holds in the brilliant thinking of the Holy Fathers. This research involved a careful reading of the relevant patristic texts, especially the ascetic theological literature, which in

common language is called analysis of key sources. We focused around those who were important to the current theme. They were not few because the Fathers almost never forgot to refer to the body when referring to the deification of the human soul. Thus, the maximum difficulty was given by the multitude of references to the human body, even if some of them less explicit. We followed the issue of the body, including in *Filocalia românească*, because the theological discourse rests on the Fathers' wisdom, which is a fundamental milestone, an array of theological thought. At the same time, it should not surprise anyone that the texts from *Filocalia* do not present a unified vision in terms of exposure accuracy. This is not possible because the authors are very different, both in manner of approach, mainly due to the time and proper historical context. We will not encounter among *Filocalia* writings the same expressions on the body, nor other works specifically dedicated to this theme, each of the authors taking after those before them and interpreting their meanings by deepening into the personal spiritual experience, in line with the challenges of the times when they lived. Besides *Filocalia* writings' authors, we have consulted texts not included in the collection of the twelve volumes translated by priest Dumitru Stăniloae, but fundamental for the definition of the body, such as St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Basil the Great, Evagrius of Pontus, St. Macarius of Egypt, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John Damascene, St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, St. Justin Popovici, Archimandrite Sophronius Sakharov. In the same time, this paper will intervene, even if sometimes only tangentially, in the areas of confluence and interdisciplinary approach to show that the meaning of the body stimulates and interests the contemporary mentality in the context of modern science, such as medical biotechnology, social anthropology or in newer areas such as neuroscience, cyber technologies, etc.

The paper is structured in three parts, totaling eight chapters. They are preceded by contents and introduction, and conclude with a summary of research findings and finally the bibliography. Part I includes the first two chapters, followed by Part II, chapters 3rd to 6th, along with Part III which contains chapters 7th and 8th.

The first part, entitled **The Body from the Interdisciplinary Perspective: Philosophical, Historical, and Medical**, includes two chapters devoted to the scientific approach of the body. The first chapter is devoted to clarify the terminology related to the notion of the body or flesh. In essence, the first part proposes to specify a particular architecture of the human thought provoked by the idea of the body. Therefore, the very carefully argued explanations represent an important basis for the further development of the paper. It is worth mentioning that the human observations related to the body were subject over time to general concern. The man reflected on himself first and therefore the philosophical discourse includes to some extent the historical, but also the medical one. It is easy to detect this idea, especially if it is noticed that there are points of confluence

between medical anthropologies, different tendencies of philosophical thinking and different interpretations of the idea of the body throughout history.

In the first chapter, the Old Testament anthropology is emphasized, where *basar* is not understood separately from soul - *nefesh*. The noun *nefesh* was rendered in Greek Septuagint with *psyche* and in the Latin Vulgate with *anima*. *Nefesh* appears as a physical and spiritual reality, as a final result of the work of God, whereas the body liveliness, *ruach*, comes from outside, respectively from God, who alone has the fully *ruach*⁸. The body must not be understood outside the profound association with the soul. The human body is animated and the soul is embodied, the dualism being rejected. In the New Testament, St. John the Evangelist says: *The Word became flesh* (Jn 1, 14), *σὰρξ* not *σομα*, thus showing that the Son of God assumed the whole human nature: body and soul.

Whilst in the previous chapter the approach was centered on the concept of *flesh* in the Holy Scripture, in the second chapter we mentioned the terminology from the philosophical perspective, and also different „metaphors” of the idea of the body. In the same time, the historical side of this chapter is highlighted by several aspects that have shaped the notion of the human body in various contexts of medieval Western spirituality. We preferred studying the Western Latin space, because here the human body has left many memorable „images”, which marked the history of Western Christianity in an effort to assert considerably, after the extinction of the Roman Empire in 479 A.D. It is a history reflecting the avatars of the idea of the body and body perception of the Western medieval man. The body is examined by the doctors, praised in works of art and literary creations, but without overlooking the Christian spirituality specific to those times, with its habits and sometimes popular superstitions.

The organization of this chapter continues with presenting certain aspects of the place and legitimacy of modern medicine compared with the traditional and parallel medicine, outlining the final idea that the patient today must no longer be seen as a man without identity, as a gear of machine parts, a system of elements in which the doctor can fulfill his demiurgic vocation. At the same time, we issued several parts of the body phenomenology, after Mealeau Ponty and Michel Henri, including one of moral ambiguity perspectives offered by the postmodern ethics, through the recovery of individual happiness and personal fulfillment. The body means the man - an idea emphasized today by the human body need for major transformations of symbolism, requiring specific techniques and approaches: body building, diet, jogging, surfing, etc.

⁸ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Petre Semen, „Originea, sensul și valoarea vieții în gândirea iudaică și creștină”, in *Analele științifice*, new series, volume VII, year 2004, p. 236.

The second part, the value of the human body in the theology of the Fathers, shows the concept of the body in the view of the Orthodox spirituality, from the perspective that the Orthodox Christian anthropology attaches to the value of the body. First, it must be said that the body was molded by God (*Fc 2,7*), but also because, through Him and with Him, the soul can act. The Word of God assumed human flesh from the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, at the Incarnation, employing the same body to rise to heaven. According to our faith, each man will raise his body. The Holy Fathers avoided the Platonic and Neo-platonic terminology, defending the Orthodox anthropology against Gnosticism, Origenism, and other later heresies, the Messaliens, the Bogomils and the Cathars, constantly keeping the destined community of the soul with the body. The body is part of the human being, having the same dignity as the soul.

The next chapter deals with the primordial state of the human body, the notions of *mind* and *senses of body* and *soul, heart* and *thoughts*. Particular attention is paid to the latter's analysis of the sins of the flesh as the embodiment of the flesh or the embodiments of the thoughts coming from the heart. Furthermore, the sick body and the advice about healing given by the Fathers will be the subject of the last part of the third chapter. The concept of "healing" is given attention in the next chapter as well, by presenting the grounds on which the human nature can be cured, namely, the Incarnation of the Word, the only new thing under the sun (St. John Damascene). When we talk about the Incarnation, the Pauline conception stating that the Church is the Body of Christ is applied in extension to the Christian family and its unity. Only after these clarifications of theological foundation, we can talk about healing itself that will end the fourth chapter. The structure of the paper continues with the presentation of the ascetic endeavor, as the healing work of the body, and also with the body's participation in the prayer, especially the prayer of the heart. The first part of the fifth chapter deals in the end with the concept of the *monk*, meaning a man fighting the sin, the world and even himself or his body. His mortification, which is praised by the ascetic literature, is a shared priority of both the monk and the married man. They both must pass through the fire of asceticism and illumination through tears and painful heart to aspire to the communion with Christ. Naturally, the cleansed of sin man becomes the place for the coming of the Spirit and the knowledge of Christ. He, Christ, is born spiritually in the heart which surrenders to Him, attiring the whole man in the shiny and transparent coat of Christian virtues.

The second part, the most comprehensive in the composition of the work ends with the happy prospect of the man united with God, the man who sees Him through his own body. Deification refers not only to his soul, but also to his body. The dynamics involved in transforming the image of God in man, in the resemblance with Him, engages also the deification of the body, which becomes the transparency of the irradiation from creating the grace generated by the heart.

The luminous body of the man united with God is the perspective that the Orthodox spirituality offers to the man nowadays, contrasting with his carnal and hedonistic conception. Therefore the theological anthropology based on the persona of Christ and the Holy Spirit brings the human body at the dignity which he had as its original vocation: to deify in order to rise with his soul.

For the last part of this paper, the theme is **The significance of the body for the contemporary man** and its contents are concerned, on the one hand, with the bioethical challenges to the body, and, on the other hand, it brings into attention the strongest testimonies on the theology of the body.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the implications that the technological development has on the body, the new ideal of corporality, cyber-body, medical prosthesis like, for example, keeping the necessary cells in vitro fertilization after the death of their donors. All the methods of expanding the biological body „life” by cryogenics, remodeling or shaping it after different aesthetic ideals, are matters of reflection for the man these days.

The next chapter presents the neo-patristic perspective on the human body, as it is reflected in the thoughts of Father Archimandrite Sophronius Sakharov and the Professor Priest Dumitru Stăniloae. The introduction of this final chapter brings forth the concept of the body reflected in the thoughts of St. Justin Popovici.

In the conclusions, we have shown how the proposed working hypothesis has been achieved, the extent to which the bibliography and the research methods were consistent with the objective pursued and, last but not least, what could be the options for further development on this theme, on which coordinates and with what resources, in the event of sustaining this research,.

Even if today the penetrating judgment is trying to control the mystery of its existence, the so loved and ignored human body remains inexhaustible to the technical eye of science. Its universe reflects the rationale of its Creator, Which printed Himself on it when He created Adam’s soul. The value of the body, as we wanted to show in this work, lies not only in what he is now, in this world, beautiful but ephemeral, but in what it may become, appared in Christ’s light and everlasting.

The Fathers’ texts, an accurate patristic theology, offer pages of rare beauty on the body’s mission, setting clear details of any further theological development. Their readers will always find in them answers to many of the bioethics concerns and challenges towards contemporary man. The manner in which the Fathers approached the human body over time can be used by the researcher of today’s patristic texts to reveal a true hermeneutic of the body with higher potential valences for the actual theological discourse. Rediscovering the value of the human body can allow people nowadays to rediscover the Body of Church and thus the life of Church.

The abundance of patristic literature of recent years shows that the public interest in Orthodox anthropology allows exploiting the teaching about the value and mission of the human body to the full potential.

The Orthodox spirituality has the means and the intrinsic power to suggest to the secularized world these days another sudden human and divine perspective on the human body, in a speech instilled with the authentic Christian living and the always fresh and invigorating living spirit of the Fathers' writings. It can ensure the ferment that our society needs to recover the lost value of the human life, by association with the other theological disciplines.

In the context of the new challenges of the contemporary world, the message of the Holy Fathers is not one of the many offers of salvation, but the testimony of the only way to deification, the union of man with God. At the beginning of this millennium, the practical updating of these sacred teachings, the renewal of the anthropological discourse by deepening the authentic Tradition in the liturgical and sacramental space of the Church may be the right mission, but also the challenge of the Orthodox spirituality for the man of today and tomorrow.

KEYWORDS

affects, anthropology, asceticism, body, corporality, cyber-body, thoughts of the flesh, incineration, heart, deification, mind, bodily death, holy relics, spiritual senses, bodily senses, spirituality, transplant, body, bodily virtues;

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