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The Human Being as Embodied Spiritual Being. Reflections on Human Corporeality as an Epiphany of the Person, in the Light of the Orthodox Anthropology and Spirituality

Abstract

In the present study, I will present several theological aspects resulting from the creation of human being as an embodied spiritual being. Bringing into this discussion the comments of some Church Fathers and contemporary theologians, I will highlight the fact that in the creation of the human body, God was extremely careful to make it able to express and reflect man's moral life and spiritual dynamics. Particular emphasis will be placed on the interdependence and shared destiny of soul and body and on



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underscoring the reality that the body is a subjectivized matter due to the presence of the soul within it. The considerations regarding the body as an epiphany of the mystery of the person are meant to show that through human corporeality, the feelings and spiritual dynamism of man are expressed and embodied. From this perspective, the body, alongside the soul, manifests the mystery of the person created by God, and at the same time, it is able to express – through its specific language – a part of this mystery of man.

Keywords

Creation, God, soul, body, mystery of man, image, matter

1 Introduction

In recent decades a vast amount of literature has been written on the topic of the body. Almost no field has eschewed this exceedingly topical issue. Philosophy, anthropology, sociology, literature, medicine, or biotechnology – to name just some of the most important contemporary approaches – analyse the issue of the human body from different standpoints in an attempt to *say* something about the human being. In contemporary philosophy, phenomenologists distinguish between the perception of the subjective body (Germ. Leib, Fr. chair) and that of the body of the other (Germ. Körper, Fr. corps). Sociologists scrutinize the body in relation to the emergence of contemporary individualism (Anthony Giddens)¹, the dissolution of the great political and

¹ See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, 1991, pp. 70-108.

religious transcendences (David Le Breton, Isabelle Queval)², or the advent and development of consumer society (Jean Baudrillard, Mike Featherstone)³. The body was seen both as the most precious object of consumption and as the object of salvation (Baudrillard)⁴, as a means of salvation (David Le Breton)⁵, as well as the last reality on which all human life and identity depend. It has even been said that man takes care of his body as he once took care of his soul, or that nowadays, the body is striving to gain a bit more soul (David Le Breton)⁶. It follows that contemporary society places a greater emphasis on the body at the expense of the spiritual side of man.

On the other hand, from a theological perspective, Olivier Clément⁷ is credited with emphasizing the fact that, particularly in the Divine Liturgy, the human body becomes a language for living and expressing faith. In the Divine, Liturgy, man listens to the word of God and responds to it through the movements and gestures of the body so that the body itself becomes a doxological and liturgical epiphany. From a different viewpoint, patrologist

² See David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et la modernité*, Presse Universitaire du France, coll. *Quadrige*, 1990 (in Romanian: *Antropologia corpului și modernitatea* [Anthropology of the Body and Modernity], translation by Doina Lică, Editura Amacord, Timișoara, 2002); Isabelle Queval, „Le corps et la performance”, in: *Actualité et dossier en santé publique*, n° 67, juin 2009, pp. 43-44; Isabelle Queval, „L’industrialisation de hédonisme. Nouveaux cultes du corps: de la production de soi à la perfectibilité addictive”, in: *Psychotropes*, 18 (2012), nr. 1, pp. 23-43.

³ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation. Ses mythes, ses structures*, préface de J. P. Mayer, Éditions Denoël, 1970, pp. 199-238; Mike Featherstone, „The Body in Consumer Culture”, in: *Theory, Culture and Society*, I (1982), pp. 18-33.

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *La société de consommation...*, p. 200.

⁵ David Le Breton, *Antropologia corpului...*, p. 150.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁷ Olivier Clément, *Trupul morții și al slavei. Scurtă introducere la o teopoetică a trupului* [*The Body of Death and Glory. Short Introduction to a Theopoetics of the Body*], translation by Eugenia Vlad, Editura Christiana, București, 1996, pp. 25-26.

Jean-Claude Larchet⁸ develops a theology of the body in order to underscore the eternal destiny of the body according to Orthodox theology, based on the writings of the Church Fathers. He thus responds to the strictly materialistic and mechanistic view of the body prevalent in contemporary society.

Setting out from the above considerations, our study aims to present the intimate connection between soul and body that results from God's act of creating the human; we will emphasize the role of the body as the support of human spiritual life on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the shared destiny of the two components that make up the human being. In this way, we hope to offer an answer to contemporary society, which, in various forms, proposes and cultivates a reductionist view of the body.

2 The body, subjectivized matter, and support or premise of human spiritual life

A synthesis of the spiritual and the material worlds, unifying in its person heaven and earth according to the account of creation in the book *Genesis*, the human being is brought into existence by God as an embodied spiritual creature from the very beginning⁹: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2, 7). If man crowns the whole of visible creation and holds a special, noble, and unique position within it – thus distinguishing himself from the rest of living creatures and from the material nature – this is precisely due to his dichotomous constitution, his very special composition, that is,

⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului în Ortodoxie [Theology of the Body]*, translation by Monahia Antonia, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010.

⁹ See Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, coll. *Biblioteca Teologică*, ediția a doua, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 266.

to the way and the special act by which God inserted the soul into the body created from dust, whereby man becomes a living, personal existence¹⁰, that is, a “living soul”¹¹. In his homilies on the book of *Genesis*, Saint John Chrysostom interprets this short definition of the human being provided by the Holy Scripture and says that by the phrase “living soul” we must actually understand a soul “enjoying vital force, having limbs to its body that respond to this vital force and obey its will”¹².

Despite its dichotomous structure or perhaps precisely because of it, man enters into creation as a unitary being, and this unity and uniqueness of the human being is based on the unity of the image of God in man who, according to Father Dumitru Popescu, “embraces both soul and body”¹³. Therefore, this particular

¹⁰ Dumitru Radu (coord.), *Îndrumări misionare [Missionary Advices]*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1986, pp. 177-178.

¹¹ See Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia [The Orthodoxy]*, coll. *Biblioteca Teologică*, seria *Teologi Ortodocși Străini*, translation by Dr. Irineu Ioan Popa, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 69: “The human came out of God’s hands as a ‘living being’; it does not have a soul, it is a soul, it is a body, it is ψυχή, *nefesh*. If the soul vanished, there would be no body left, only the dust of the earth ‘for dust you are, and to dust you shall return’”.

¹² Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Facere [Homilies on Genesis] (I)*, XII, 5, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești 21*, translation, introduction and notes by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 145. For the English version see: Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis, 1-17* (The Fathers of the Church, Volume 74), XII, 15, transl. by Robert C. Hill, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 1999, p. 166.

¹³ See Dumitru Popescu, *Iisus Hristos Pantocrator [Jesus Christ Pantocrator]*, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2005, p. 168. According to the French Orthodox theologian Jean-Claude Larchet, when the Church Fathers address the issue of the man created as soul and body, they stress the “indissoluble unity” of the two components of the human nature. To this respect, the French patologist quotes St. Irenaeus: “For that flesh which has been moulded is not a perfect man in itself, but the body of a man, and part of a man. Neither is the soul itself, considered apart by itself, the man; but

constitution of man as embodied soul places him from the very beginning at the intersection of two worlds, or of two universes that are different with respect to their substance, but that are, nevertheless, admirably and ineffably united in the human person.

According to Father John Meyendorff, “the dual nature of man is not simply a static juxtaposition of two heterogeneous elements, a mortal body and an immortal soul: it reflects a dynamic function of man between God and creation”¹⁴. A similar idea was expressed by the theologian Dan-Ilie Ciobotea, the current Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church, when he asserted that the duality of human nature is the basis of the “ontological background” of man’s mediating and unifying vocation encapsulated in the relationship between image and Archetype and characterized by the tension between image and likeness¹⁵.

Regarding the same issue of man’s mediating and unifying vocation, Father Stăniloae interprets the theological reflections of Saint Maximus the Confessor on the creation of man and suggests that there is a double purpose to humans being

it is the soul of a man, and part of a man”; see Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului în Ortodoxie [Theology of the Body]*, translation by Monahia Antonia, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 19.

¹⁴ John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantină. Tendințe istorice și teme doctrinare [Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes]*, coll. *Biblioteca Teologică, seria Teologi Ortodocși Străini*, translation by Alexandru I. Stan, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1996, p. 189. For the English version see John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, Fordham University Press, 1987, p. 141.

¹⁵ His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, *Teologie și spiritualitate [Theology and Spirituality]*, Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române, București, 2010, p. 127. This book is the revised and edited version of the doctoral dissertation the author defended at Strasbourg in 1978; the text was restructured and condensed and the resulting thesis was later defended at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest in 1980 (for more details, see the Preface of the book).

fashioned as dichotomous beings. He points out, on the one hand, that man was made up of soul and body so that through his soul, he could bring God closer to his body in order to achieve a perfect union with Him. On the other hand, given the fact that it has a double nature, the human being can extend to its fellows and to share with them – through its body – the love it receives from God, thus spreading God’s power over the entire creation¹⁶. We can infer from the ideas of the Romanian theologian that man’s unifying vocation, originating in the twofold composition of his being, manifests itself both vertically, when man unites all creation with God, and horizontally, when the person shares the love he receives from God with his fellow men, and they all become united with one another, joined by this divine love. Furthermore, according to the same Father Stăniloae, man’s uniqueness within the boundaries of visible creation – namely that of combining the divine breath and the matter of the “theologically organized”¹⁷ world in a perfect personal entity¹⁸ –

¹⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 1991, p. 24.

¹⁷ Cf. Panayotis Nellas, “Théologie de l’image”, in: *Contacts*, 25 (1973), p. 266. According to the Greek theologian, man “was the first biological force – clearly the highest of those present on the face of the earth on the sixth day of creation – who was elevated by the breath of the Spirit to the spiritual life, that is to say to the theocentric life. The created matter, ‘the dust’, was thus organized theologically for the first time. The material creation received a shape and a structure in God’s image. Life on earth becomes conscious and personal”.

¹⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor in his work, *Ambigua*, spoke about the fact that within man, the body and the soul form a composite nature, a single species or a common species. Indicating the complementarity of the two elements of the human being, as well as the impossibility of separating them in it, St. Maximus asserts the idea of their perfect hypostatic union within the human person. See Lars Thunberg, *Antropologia teologică a Sfântului Maxim Mărturisitorul: Microcosmos și mediator*, translation by Anca Popescu, Ed. Sophia, București, 2005, pp. 115-117 for the Romanian version, and, for the English version see *idem*, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, Second Edition, Chicago, Open Court, 1995, p. 97-100.

is what gives the human being its inestimable dignity and value¹⁹.

This special significance enjoyed by man in relation to other creatures, his splendor, and supremacy over all visible beings²⁰, stems both from the fact that he is a creature who through his soul is related to God, being endowed with those qualities that raise him at the height of divine life by grace, as well as by the personal manner, by the special and attentive care with which God fashioned his body from dust. While the bodies of other creatures have come into existence following God's command, "let there be..." the way the human body was shaped highlights the Creator's much more personal and intimate involvement and commitment to the human being who is destined to resemble Him²¹. Father Dumitru Stăniloae states that by creating man, "God intervenes with a special action in the shaping of his body from the earth. This shows that Adam's body was invisibly organized by the act of God as a personal body, unlike the way in which the living bodies of other species were constituted indiscriminately by the will of God. But this personal body of man could not but have in it what is proper to man, that is, his rational, shaping soul"²².

If, according to the patristic interpretations of the act of creation, the real reason why God brought all things, and especially man,

¹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 257.

²⁰ See Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața creștinului [The Image of Christ in the Life of the Christian]*, Ed. Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 24.

²¹ See Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, text and translation by Robert M. Grant, Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970, p. 57: "When God said, 'Let us make man after our image and likeness', he first reveals the dignity of man. For after making everything else by a word, God considered all this as incidental; he regarded the making of man as the only work worthy of his own hands".

²² Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu [God's Immortal Image]*, vol. 1, coll. *Oikoumene. Mari autori creștini*, ediție îngrijită de Camil Marius Dădărlat, Cristal, București, 1995, p. 172.

into existence is for them to partake of the overflowing Trinitarian love, then this parental love of the Creator for man is also explicitly revealed in the care with which his body receives its form and identity within creation – “the Lord God *formed man* of the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2, 7). The way in which the human body is molded by God, the structure of the body in relation to that of the other living beings also indicates its identity within creation. Based on the erect position of the human body, some of the Holy Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Gregory of Nyssa, said that man is the only living being who looks “upwards”, that is, towards God.

When interpreting the biblical verse that depicts the “modelling” of Adam from the dust of the earth Saint Basil the Great captures the following paradox regarding the human. The Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia shows that, although the shaping of the bodily part of man from dust is an indication of his humble condition²³²⁴, the certainty that God “molded him with his own hands”, the “particular loving skill”²⁵ used by the Creator to bring him to the existence, as well as the divine “workshop” in which he came into the world, attest to the greatness due to the human being by the fact that it was brought to life out of love. Moreover, the blissful context in which man was fashioned causes the great Cappadocian father to marvel “by what wisdom my body is structured”, that is, the body of man in general. Therefore, by looking at this “small work of construction” which came out of

²³ See St. Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*, II, 12, translation and introduction by Nonna Verna Harrison, St. Vladimir’s Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2005, p. 58-59: “indeed everything, whether great or small, that you do is on the earth – you have nearby the memory of your lowliness”.

²⁴ A similar idea is expressed by St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 1–17, XII, 12, p. 164: “What is that you say? Taking dust from the earth he shaped the human being? Yes, it says; it did not simply say ‘earth’ but ‘dust’, something more lowly and substantial even than earth, so to say”.

²⁵ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Despre originea omului [On the Human Condition]*, II, 4, pp. 317-318, and p. 51 in the English edition.

the hands of the Wise Creator, we may come to understand His greatness²⁶.

On the one hand, the special creation of the human body from the matter taken from the world whose creation had already been completed on the sixth day highlights man's solidarity with the material, created, visible world²⁷. Olivier Clément notes in this sense that: "through his body man participates in the world of matter and life, or rather the body is the means by which the person is integrated into the universal matter, the structure through which personal existence personalizes the universe"²⁸. On the other hand, the complete attention showed by God in His modeling of the human body from dust with his own hands – the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to Saint Irenaeus of Lyon – presents man as clearly different from the material world, especially in that his body is animated or imprinted with the breath or grace of the Holy Spirit. "The dust of the earth" – says an Orthodox theologian – "was kneaded and shaped by the hands of God, according to the scriptural anthropomorphic expressions. This sets man above any other body in which there is life"²⁹. The very fact that God as Creator shapes or moulds the human body means, moreover, that he *prepares it* in a very special way, he endows it with a special, sublime purpose, he gives it a singular particularity, he imprints rationality in order

²⁶ Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Despre originea omului [On the Human Condition]* I, 2, p. 296, and p. 32 in the English edition.

²⁷ His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, *Teologie și spiritualitate [Theology and Spirituality]*, p. 127.

²⁸ Cf. Olivier Clément, *Întrebări asupra omului [Questions on Man]*, cuvânt înainte de P. Boris Bobrinskoy, translation by Iosif Pop and Ciprian Șpan, Editura Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române Alba-Iulia, 1997, p. 75.

²⁹ Constantine Callinicos, *The Foundations of Faith. An in-depth explanation of the Eastern Orthodox Creed*, translation and revision by Rev. George Dimopoulos, Scraton, Christian Orthodox Editions, 1975, p. 66.

to become a basis, a premise or a receptacle of human spiritual life³⁰.

According to Father Stăniloae, the divine act by which man was created, an act that required the bodily nature to be fashioned out of the dust of the earth and then animated by God, proves that the man enjoys “a special position not only in relation to the nature from whence his body was created but also in relation to God”³¹. While quoting and commenting on Saint Gregory the Theologian, who stated that “as dust, I am bound to the life below; but since I am also a speck of the divine, I carry in me the desire for the life to come”³², the Romanian theologian asserts that in his future life man’s ascent to God concerns both his soul and his body, that is to say, the person in its entirety, because since the body takes part in the life of the soul, is also destined to experience transfiguration and spiritualization³³. Though it is made of dust, the human body differs from the matter of the world by the fact that the plasticized rationality of created matter reaches its highest complexity in man’s biological body³⁴. “Generally, the fact that the soul and the body make up a single being shows that man is not just material. His body is a spiritually organized and exalted matter, permeated by the spirit and transformed into a complex organism by it; and the spirit contains all the powers that organize and manifest themselves through the body. (...) The spirit united with the body makes man

³⁰ See Dumitru Radu (coord.), *Îndrumări misionare [Missionary Advices]*, p. 180, 186.

³¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 257

³² St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata dogmatica*, VIII, P.G. 37, col. 452, apud. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 257.

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 257, 253.

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 257.

in his multiple manifestations an inexhaustible and unique abyss and an unfathomable mystery for knowledge”³⁵.

Being imprinted, from the very beginning, by the inner presence of the soul, the human body becomes a form of subjectivized materiality. Through the action of the soul that permeates and organizes it, the materiality of the body surpasses the biological and psychochemical plane proper to other living things. In this sense, by virtue of its participation in the life of the soul, the body can no longer be thought of as a simple object – according to Father Stăniloae –, but as a participating subject³⁶. At this point, Father D. Stăniloae develops from a theological perspective some reflections on the quality of the subject of the body belonging to the Christian existentialist thinker and philosopher Gabriel Marcel³⁷.

The Romanian theologian states the following: “In the reality of my body, there is something that transcends what would be called the materiality of the body and its purely automatic movements, something that cannot be reduced to its material properties”³⁸.

3 The body as epiphany of the human mystery, and the dynamics of moral-spiritual life

The body is – in its turn – part of the person and expresses the person³⁹ in its entirety; nonetheless, the body is united in a very

³⁵ See Dumitru Stăniloae, *Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu [God's Immortal Image]*, vol. 2, coll. *Oikoumene. Mari autori creștini*, edited by Camil Marius Dădârlat, Cristal, București, 1995, p. 44.

³⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 252.

³⁷ See Gabriel Marcel, *Journal Métaphysique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1927, p. 230.

³⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 252.

³⁹ Olivier Clément, *Trupul morții și al slavei. Scurtă introducere la o teopoetică a trupului [The Body of Death and Glory. Short Introduction to*

intimate way with the soul, so it is very difficult to clearly distinguish their actions within their synergy in the human being as a whole. This is due to the fact that in the human being, the action of the soul always presupposes and implies the capacity of the body to translate the soul's feelings and movements through its own manifestations and gestures – through its characteristic *language*. The movements and actions of the soul affect the body and elevate it to a high degree of spiritualization. Through the body, therefore, this spiritualization that is enabled by the soul also includes the material world in its entirety, as it too is attracted to reach an even higher degree of spiritualization. Without the existence of the body, any contact with or any action or the manifestation in the material world would be impossible. Nevertheless, the body and its perverted desires influence the way the soul is, drawing it to the lower, ephemeral realities and enslaving it to the passions. This influence or power of the body over the soul is discernible, especially after the event of the Fall, when the unity between the two constituent parts of the human being was compromised. After the Fall, the intimate connection between soul and body does not disappear because it is an ontological datum of the human being⁴⁰. The sin transforms the unity between soul and body into enmity between the two, the latter seeking to overpower and divert the actions of the former from their target. Saint Paul the Apostle himself seemed to be convinced of this truth when he stated in his Epistle to the Galatians that “the flesh lusts against the Spirit” (Galatians 5, 17). In a footnote referring to a reflection of Saint Athanasius the Great on the consequences of the Fall for human bodies, Father Dumitru Stăniloae clarifies in metaphorical form the relationship and interdependence between soul and body within the human being:

a Theopoetics of the Body], translation by Eugenia Vlad, Editura Christiana, București, 1996, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului... [Theology of the Body]*, p. 21.

“The soul does not remain devoid of the lusts of the body and undisturbed by the external images, nor does the body remain devoid of the powers of the soul. The soul and the body do not live their lives side by side, but each is filled by all that the other possesses. The soul grows in the body like a plant that has its roots in the heavenly firmament, and the body has its roots in the soul. It could be said that the reason or rationality of the body is implanted as an intelligible skeleton in the soul, and on its basis, the body is built at birth and rebuilt at the resurrection. This is the foundation of the close unity of the soul and the body”⁴¹.

This inseparable unity of soul and body within the created person, their intimate, apophatic union, is emphasized by most patristic authors in their interpretations of the creation of man as a dual nature. The French Orthodox patrologist Jean-Claude Larchet explains this teaching of the Church Fathers by showing that by asserting man’s dichotomous nature, they rejected all forms of materialism or naturalism, which tended to reduce man to a simple biological reality and to consider the soul to be a mere epiphenomenon of the body, as well as any spiritualist notions of Gnostic, Neoplatonic, or Origenist⁴² nature, which saw the body

⁴¹ See Dumitru Stăniloae’s footnote nr. 40 in *Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare, Cuvânt împotriva elinilor [Against the Heathen]*, in: *Scrieri. Partea I*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 15, traducere din grecește, introducere și note de D. Stăniloae, Ed. Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1987, p. 40.

⁴² See John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 140-141: “Against Origen, the Fathers unanimously affirmed that man is a unity of soul and body. On this point, the Biblical view decidedly overcame Platonic spiritualism; by the same token, the *visible* world and its *history* were recognized as worthy of salvation and redemption. If, in the Origenistic system, the diversity of visible phenomena was only a consequence of the Fall and of the bodily nature of man, an ‘engrossed’ and defective mode of the soul’s existence, the only true and eternal reality being spiritual and divine, the Biblical Christian concept understood the universe in its entirety as ‘very good’; and this concept applied first of all to man”.

as a sign of the fallen condition of the soul, a tomb or prison, while claiming the soul represented the true essence of man⁴³.

In response to these philosophical-religious teachings that the Church considered to be wrong, the Church Fathers deemed the body as equal to the soul in dignity, and they substantiated their views with scriptural arguments. In the simultaneous creation of body and soul by God, the Fathers saw their unity of destiny, that is, the fact that the path to theosis was open to both constituent elements of the human person. Moreover, in asserting that the body enjoys the same dignity as the soul, the Church Fathers also sought to prove that matter itself, from which the human body is molded or shaped, is not an evil thing or any source of evil⁴⁴, as the Neoplatonic, Gnostic or dualistic currents professed – as did the Origenist doctrine in the primary Church – postulating a notable ontological and axiological difference between soul and body. On the contrary, patristic theologians claimed the evil in the world has no cause in the matter itself⁴⁵ but in the evil or misguided use of man’s fundamental freedom⁴⁶.

In fact, at the end of the six days of the creation of the material world, Holy Scripture records that all that the Creator brought into existence was “very good” (Genesis 1, 31). In other words,

⁴³ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului... [Theology of the Body]*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁴ See Nicolae Mladin, Orest Bucevski, Constantin Pavel, Ioan Zăgrean, *Teologia Morală Ortodoxă [Orthodox Moral Theology]*, vol. 2, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba-Iulia, 2003, p. 112.

⁴⁵ See Dumitru I. Belu, “Sfinții Părinți despre trup” [The Holy Fathers on the body], in: *Studii Teologice*, IX (1957), nr. 5-6, p. 299: “In order to prove that the body is not evil by nature, that it is not the cause of sin and of all the ills that torment the human life, the leaders of the Church endeavoured – always tactfully and patiently, often with surprising insight – to show that the matter, and the material world as a whole, is not only not evil, but that for the man it is a fundamental condition of his well-being”.

⁴⁶ Sf. Atanasie cel Mare, *Cuvânt împotriva elinilor [Against the Heathen]*, pp. 37-38.

God's visible creation did not have any created imperfection⁴⁷ but contained in itself all the prerequisites necessary to sustain man's life on earth and his progress towards God. In this context, the human body, taken from the earth and shaped by the special care of the Creator, is by nature neither evil in itself nor does it pose a moral threat to man. The very fact that God touches the dust of the earth to give shape to the human frame proves that the body receives a special honour and that it is built by the Creator as a suitable environment for the manifestation of the spiritual life in the visible world⁴⁸.

The role of the body as the serving organ of the soul and its collaborator in the moral and spiritual life of man stems from its very feature of being an interface or intermediary between the spiritual world of the soul and the material world. If man had possessed by creation only a spiritual nature like angels, then he could not have acted fully within the material universe. Therefore, God prepared the body expressly so that by its intimate union with the soul, the latter could exercise its freedom over material things through and with the help of the body⁴⁹.

God's command to the first humans, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28), requires and at the same time stresses the crucial role of the body in fulfilling this mandate entrusted by God to Adam and Eve and, through them,

⁴⁷ See Paul Evdokimov, *Ortodoxia [The Orthodoxy]*, p. 69: "Everything that was created is 'very good': evil does not stem from man's condition as a creature, because his being was good from the very beginning, whereas evil was something foreign to him. Evil does not come from below, from what is corporeal, but from above, from what is spiritual. The origin of evil is to be found among the angels, and only then in a choice made by the human spirit. It only then penetrates and settles itself in the 'fissures' of the being whose integrity was shattered and whose hierarchical structure was perverted. These premises are absolutely necessary for the foundation of biblical personalism."

⁴⁸ Irineu Pop Bistrițeanul, *Chipul lui Hristos în viața creștinului [The Image of Christ in the Life of the Christian]*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă [Orthodox Dogmatic Theology]*, vol. 1, p. 252.

to all their descendants. Without the body, people – perceived as mere spiritual natures – would not be able to accomplish what God asks of them⁵⁰. It is only through the flesh that the humans' free will is manifested and materialized in the world, and their obedience to the command of the Lord is shown. "In fashioning him of soul and body, God has given man the role of ruler of all and in all, including of the body which was made partaker of this authority of God and unifier of all in God"⁵¹. The same is true of other qualities and faculties of the human soul, which, in the absence of a body, could not be perceived in our world and would not become visible in the eyes of others. Therefore, from this point of view, the body mediates or extends in the plane of materiality the feelings and intentions of the soul.

Defined with a great deal of depth by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church, "the body is the epiphany of human mystery. Through his body, man manifests the fullness of his person"⁵². The body externalizes, therefore, what in the soul comes into being as intention, thought, or feeling. In this way, intelligence, as an aspect or particular characteristic of the rational nature of man, is brought to the knowledge of others through the body, through the way man expresses his thoughts, speaks, or behaves towards others. Feelings of love for one's neighbour are *embodied* in the act of helping, in words of encouragement or in the willingness to commune with others⁵³. The body is also the vehicle through which freedom as an expression of man's will becomes manifest in relation to others, to the world, and even in man's relationship with his body.

⁵⁰ See His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, *Teologie și spiritualitate [Theology and Spirituality]*, p. 134.

⁵¹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de Teologie Dogmatică... [Studies of Dogmatic Theology]*, p. 24.

⁵² His Beatitude Daniel Ciobotea, *Teologie și spiritualitate [Theology and Spirituality]*, p. 134.

⁵³ See Jean-Claude Larchet, *Semnificația trupului... [Theology of the Body]*, p. 34.

In general, our face, its expressions – probably the element that makes the body of each person truly unique⁵⁴ – reveal the inner life of each person, the intensities and spiritual dynamism of the soul. It is probably no coincidence that human joy – and especially spiritual joy – is reflected primarily on our face as it radiates a spiritual glow and is able to change others and their mood when they share in this visible bliss. Nevertheless, joy is not the only feeling one can observe on a person’s face: there are also other emotions such as sadness, anger, hatred, etc. From this point of view, the body also translates by means of its facial expression the evil thoughts and intentions of a person. “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?” (Genesis 4, 6), the Lord God says unto Cain when he was consumed by envy for his brother, whose sacrifice pleased God more.

Consequently, the moral value of the body springs from the fact that the body participates in the life and activity of the soul. From its creation, it received from God the well-determined role of supporting and sustaining the soul in its spiritual growth, being in its turn enriched by the fruits of this growth. The healthier – spiritually speaking – the moral condition of the body, the better it can fulfil its God-given purpose. Unfortunately, the support offered by the body in maintaining the moral life of the soul diminished after the fall of the first pair of people. Its power to co-operate with the soul, to give the spiritual element the support necessary for salvation, deteriorated significantly and often even degenerated in a reversal of the purpose for which it was intended. This is how, from a collaborator and supporter of the soul’s energies, the body became their fierce opponent and enemy.

⁵⁴ See Olivier Clément, *Întrebări asupra omului [Questions on Man]*, p. 39: “The face – this locus par excellence where nature makes itself permeable to the person by the transparency of the eyes”.

4 Conclusions

Being an embodied spiritual being is a fundamental ontological fact of the person created by God. From this perspective, human corporeality is neither an accident nor a condition added later, but something related to man's intimate reality as a creature. The matter of the human body was prepared by God in such a way as to express and sustain the dynamics of the human soul. In this sense, the matter of the human body is not an ordinary but a subjectivized matter, one in which the soul acts, one that is able to indicate and reveal the mystery of man. Destined to be the background of human spiritual life, the subjectivized matter that makes up the human body shares the same ultimate goal of transfiguration and theosis with the soul. Man is not saved outside his body but through his body. Therefore, man has a great responsibility for the spiritual state of his body, resulting in its moral value as a whole.