
THE HUMAN BODY

MASTERPIECE OF THE TRIUNE GOD

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(Received 16 November 2012, revised 2 January 2013)

Abstract

This article attempts a hermeneutic approach to the theme of the body from a theologico-linguistic perspective, implying an analysis of its relationship with the soul so that it develops into a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of man. The theme of the body – as it is that of the soul – has been a constant concern from ancient times which led to heated debates, or even division within various philosophical or theological schools regarding its soteriological role. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the eternal importance of the human body could be a solid basis for preventing and helping heal the different addictions that severely affect human dignity in its entirety, both body and soul. Biblical, patristic and modern references are used as starting points for further developments. Special reference is reserved to Father Stăniloae, the best-known Romanian theologian.

Keywords: body, soul, hermeneutics, soteriology, eschatology

1. Introduction

The issue of the human body is one of the most topical and actively debated in modern society and culture. “Culture is now as much body-oriented as it was spiritually oriented in the past, and its interest in everything concerning human body borders on obsession.” [1] Stressing the importance of the human body as “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6.19) can profoundly impact the prevention and treatment of different addictions. Now it seems we can be addicted to anything: food, sex, Internet and a whole host of things that can become the objects of compulsive behaviour. In Romania, the involvement of the Church in helping those affected by various addictions becomes more and more pragmatic [2, 3].

Sergey Horujy rightly states that modernity developed many “trends, strategies and techniques concerning our bodily constitution. The main phenomena characterizing modern attitudes to the human body include genetic experiments, which can change human biology beyond recognition. They all can be considered as practices, bringing the human person and its body to the limits of their possibilities, the borders of the horizon of human consciousness and experience.” [1, p. 102]

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Christian Theology is responsible for the Gospel announced in Holy Scripture, that is why a genuine theological anthropology must be articulated in the context of “postmodern hostility towards teleological renderings of history and the postmodern dissolution of the self. What is required is an eschatology that is properly christocentric, promissory, and prayerful, and an anthropology that is informed by such an eschatology. Christian theological anthropology is the dogmatic depiction of human identity as it is shaped by the creative, regenerative and glorifying work of the Triune God.” [4]

There is a big contrast between the value of the human body as an integral part of the human being and the value of the different components of the body. “The human body contains approximately: 65% Oxygen, 18% Carbon, 10% Hydrogen, 3% Nitrogen, 1.5% Calcium, 1% Phosphorous, 0.35% Potassium, 0.25% Sulphur, 0.15% Sodium, 0.15% Chlorine, 0.05% Magnesium, 0.0004% Iron, 0.00004% Iodine. The body contains also trace amounts of other elements, such as Silicon, Manganese, Fluorine, Copper, Zinc, Arsenic and Aluminium. The going rate for a body’s worth of these elements is about one US dollar!!! The skin would be worth about \$3.50 if it were sold at the price of a cowhide, which runs around \$0.25 per square foot. A dollar’s worth of elements plus the value of the skin would round up to \$5.” [http://chemistry.about.com/b/2011/02/06/how-much-are-the-elements-in-your-body-worth.htm]

2. Terminology

The Romanian word *corp* comes from the Latin *corpus*, similar to words in other Romance languages for example: the French *corps* and the Spanish *cuerpo* (the English *corpse* means the dead body). *Corp* reminds the cataphatic, exterior dimensions of the somatic reality, while *trup* (a Slavonic double) takes us to the apophatic dimension where one can find specific theological potentialities. The Romanian language has found a way to designate this metaphysical nuance which greatly facilitates the references to the *embodiment* (*întrupare*) of the Logos. According to C. Noica, the prefix *em-* (*în*) builds a series of words that help the theme by fixing the words that do not yet have a clear-cut distinction, like coming into being (*înființare*), deeding (*înăptuire*), structuring (*înstructurare*), and embodying (*întrupare*). This prefix “brings to the thinking, with its easiness to form compounds, the means to convey, in the right words, the real and the possible of the world. It is rooted in the fluidity and the amorphism of the world, building structures.” [5]

With Plato, the body is mortal, it does not participate to the pure existence and thus is in an irreconcilable opposition to the immortal soul which *par excellence* belongs to the real [6]. Ioan Petru Culianu – following what Broxton Onians and Anders Olerud wrote – states that Plato’s ontology and anthropology can be described as an irreconcilable dichotomy, but in the stoics it is less so. The former represents the upper dimension of the head while the latter – the inferior one, that of the emotions stemming from the heart: “Apparently, the dignity Plato offered to the human head in *Timaios* (44d, 90a) comes from an archaic complex that differs between the two organs of the conscience: ‘the heart’ (*kêr*, *kradiê*), the centre of a vegetative soul, and

‘the head’, the centre of the *psyché*. *Thymos* would be *blood-soul*, while *psyche* the *breath-soul*, and the primary difference between the two was not so great, apparently, since *thymos* itself echoes words in the Indo-European languages for smoke/breath (of the Latin *fumus*, the Sanskrit *dhumah*, the Slavic *dymu*, *duchu*). As for *psyche*, as is the case of the Latin *animus*, it is a breath in itself, since it comes from the verb *psychein* (to blow) but the exclusive confinement to the head is debatable. On the contrary, in an entire complex of beliefs, *psyche* stands for any corporal breath, relating to *sperm*, which is the ‘genital breathe’.” [7]

In Romanian, by the embodiment of the Logos, we do not understand the receiving of an opaque flash, but rather a new coming into being (*înființare*) in its very plenary sense, since in the reflection of the language – says C. Noica – “not everything that comes into being is true because the being is not covered by the chaotic phenomena and by the appearance, but only that which comes into a shape (*întruchipare*) really is”. The philosopher further corroborates this by quoting the *Menaion (Minei)* printed in Romanian language in 1776: “Coming into being (*înființându-Se*) with all our being, the Logos that transcends the being...”, and the September *Menaion (Minei)* “the Word that transcends thought and word which is the cause of all beings” [5, p. 104].

In Romanian it also another term, similar to human being (*om*) which expresses hypostatically the human nature: body and soul, threaded (*întrepătruns*) and come into being (*întruchipat*). The same language designates *body* to infer only that which derives from the mystery of the person-being, not something related to the animal realm or the object. In this sense, Mircea Vulcanescu is the first theological thinker to state the pertinent distinction between the *corp* and the *trup* in the reflexive Romanian sense. He grasps an opposition between the Romanian word and its Western counterparts where it is ontologically defined by ‘image and form’. In other words all the characteristic of existence are circumscribed within the being’s potentiality in its strictest sense. On the other hand, the word *corp* is more a “relatively fixed support of characteristics and action” [8]. Moreover, the animal has not a *trup*, even if it has primary instincts that come from the irrational part; in the same manner, in the celestial world, the angels are free from flesh instincts. Therefore, the body (*trupul*) is human by definition and is rationally sensual as opposed to the animal realm that is irrational and sexual as opposed to the celestial one rational – asexual.

From a phenomenological perspective, the body is understood within the *real* in its two dimensions of *thing* and *being* in the same time. The dimension of the life of the body is given by the apophatism of the person, but the objectification is made for the materialized body. Mircea Vulcanescu, as it has been already mentioned discussed the Romanian distinction between the *trup* as a mystical value of the human being, and the *corp* in the sense of relatively fixed support for something. “To have life which in turn makes it a *being* makes the *Object-Body* of Reality to become the *Object-Value* of the world. This *value* of the body represents its axiological dimension.” [9] Thus the holistic perspective on man in Romanian spirituality. It is worth mentioning that, unlike the French language, which carried over from Latin the terms *corpus* and *anima* with their different meanings, Romanian associated them. In order to reflect the psycho-somatic reality, there are, as it has been already mentioned,

the terms *corp* and reserved for the human being *trup* inside of which the heart (*inima* - from the Latin word *anima*) beats. The word *trup* corresponds to the Jewish *basar*, expressing *corpus* and *anima* at the same time. The word *suflet* (soul) comes from the Latin verb *sufflare*, which suggests movement, life and makes a close connection to the body [10].

The Holy Scriptures reveal the archetypal gesture of the Triune God, when man is made of dust from the ground – to where he shall return – and its breath comes from the Maker Himself. The Son of God is embodied (*întrupat* or *înomenit*) – says Romanian defining an ontology – therefore He is not incorporated which would indicate a superficial sticking of the divine nature to the the human one. Therefore, embodiment suggests a *kenosis* within the cosmos – ark of the covenant represented by the Virgin Mary to take from the inside the body but with no sin. In Romanian mythology, the earth from which the human body was created, was in the beginning, transparent. “The *Earth* was in the beginning white as light, but was later darkened after the first murder and men becoming evil. It is believed that *Earth* as any living being, has a head - the head of the *Earth* -, a heart and a tail. Water is its blood.” [11] This fact, naively expressed by the folk tales, reveals the consequences of falling into temptation, by losing a part that throws him into the nocturnal region of the sins of the flesh and implicitly into the dark of the telluric.

In this context, Christianity brings a fresh vision regarding human ontology where the body is a receiver of the grace of God, along with the soul, for the resurrection as a full person. Thus the body is on the ontological trajectory, within the *reason of being*, therefore the plenary becoming of man: as image and likeness to God. The body, in its Romanian acceptance, supposes the existence or the simple act of *being* - which is also an attribute to the other kingdoms - which does not imply an image and a hypostatic likeness to God. This Eastern understanding of the body makes it far from verging into the *body* available to the experimental sectioning of a scientific type. The body is sacred because it foretells the *embodiment* of the Saviour before the world was created. Saint Justin Popovici describes the life of man as a cross: the ontological vertical (revealed by Theology) and the phenomenological horizontal (discussed by Philosophy); life bears the name, in his view, as *logonost* or *logosity* through Creation and Embodiment, expecting the Second Coming. Logosity gives to man both an image and a being, more clearly the reason for his being as a partaker of the future eternal life. That which suspends his inner ontological logos (*delogosifică*), Saint Justin notes, is the sin which attracts death, the meaninglessness of this life and later the loss of salvation [12]. Without logos, man loses his being (*desființare*), for only man, through the axes of the cross, logosifies (*logosifica*), that is it gives to man an ontological hypostatic density.

Within the frames of the same ontology, the phenomenologist Michel Henry intuits in the Gospels of Saint John the essence of man's life under the term of *subjective body* which can be likened partly to Saint Justin Popovici's logosity. To build a theological structure, Henry needs a doubling of the term *corps* by *chair* which leads to the full meaning of the body. Thus, Henry notices the monopoly of the 'corps' in all areas leading to a materialist dialectics, even in the metaphysical ones. The French phenomenologist divides the human being into: the subjective body, an

interior one, and the objective, material one. “The former shall be named *flesh* (chair) while the latter *body* (corps). Because our body is no other than a trail, a suffering, an enduring of oneself, an enjoyment of oneself according to some ever new impressions, thus sensing the outer body, touching it and being touched by it. This is impossible for the outer body, the inert body of the material universe.” [13] In this sense, Sarah Coakley analyzes the ascetic practices of the Orthodox Church where she finds a paradox: the ascetic body is more vigorous than the secular one. “Ascetics if properly understood is a struggle not against but for the body; in this sense, the Russian theologian Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) used to urge: kill the flesh to get the body” [14]. There is a difference between *logosity* and *chair* (subjective body) due to the metaphysical history of the theological mentalities in the East (which is transcendent and non-dual) and the West (naturalist and dual). Ultimately, they both indicate the mystery of man, but for Saint Justin’s *logosity* is transcendent while for Henry *the subjective body* is of transcendental origin – which necessarily leads to transcendence – but is maintained within the autonomous immanent. „Michel Henry’s positive phenomenological position can be summarized as follows: there is an original and fundamental form of manifestation underlying the possibility of transcendence, namely, immanence. *Immanence* is thought by Michel Henry as an *autonomous* form of manifestation to be manifested; one that is identical with its own manifestation.” [15]

The issues discussed by Henry can be doubled by Peter Brown's historiography of the body, starting with early Christianity (or Saint Paul) up to the early Middle Ages (or Saint Augustine). Among the key concepts that make up the chapters, one can find ‘body and the citadel’, ‘the Church and the body’ and ‘the body and society’ which show a naturalist sombre view on the reality of the human body in relation to the spiritual dimension of the soul. Peter Brown is profoundly confused by the antinomy of the body within the economy of salvation, which opposes the ascetic vocation of Christianity – a kind of thirst for a platonic ideal – to the married man. Abstinence and mutilation of the body led in the western Christianity, he claims, to quakes of society and two types of reaction. The first: how is the human species to go on when mass abstinence is advocated; the second: in time, chastity has been confined to monasteries but man has rediscovered an obsession for his own body [16]. Brown's considerations end by stating that this ideal of chastity was saved by Christians through the mystery of the embodiment in the Holy Virgin Mary quoting an archaic text of Coptic origin where the role of the body in human life is made central [16, p. 455].

Consequently, the risks of immanence are more than evident in the present century when within Christianity “Christian bioethics without transcendence” [17] are developed. Nevertheless, with Henry, the problem of immanent corporality remains suspended in a hazy duality; on the other hand, Olivier Clement is more precise when he states “the temple of the body: if man is both person and nature, this nature supposes in itself a sort of duality” [18].

3. The human being - an unitary structure

Jean Claude Larchet's exegesis on the relationship between Job and God, emphasised that the former suffers wholly, both as a body and a soul: "Job is stricken by an illness that crushes his body and soul" [19]. Marius Lazurca also offered a very thorough synthesis of the Old Testament anthropology. The human being – he wrote – fundamentally belongs both to the earthly and to the heavenly world, but he must undergo an endless movement of ascent [20]. This understanding would not lead to a disparaging conception regarding corporality, to a dualism of Jewish origin, similar to the Platonic one. The Law scholars reject such sharp distinctions between the body and the soul: a significant argument is the fact that the term designating the body – *basar* – is never understood separately from the soul – *nephesh* [21, 22]. The body must be understood not for a single moment, not even theoretically, apart from its deep relationship with the soul, and this natural solidarity manifests itself in various ways. Above all, the body must be understood as a concrete manifestation of the soul, as its *phenomenon*; this makes the body able to express a certain 'visibility', a certain concreteness of the soul [20]. This strict interdependence between the body and the soul points to an absolutely positive vision of the human body. In fact, the body - as the rabbis state with no shadow of hesitation - constitutes the most accomplished part of the creation; it represents the *Creator's masterpiece*. First, the body is an icon of the entire created Universe, the Talmud proposing a detailed system of correspondences between the parts of the body and the elements of the created universe. Second, the Talmudic wise men lay stress on the perfect *insertion* of the body in the Universe, on its adaptive capacity and on the harmony of its functions. But Marius Lazurca draws attention to the fact that some Old-Testament texts were written in a climate dominated by Hellenistic culture. That is why the scholars speak about the existence of two anthropologies of Old-Testament origin: the first one, faithful to the original spirit of Judaism, suggests – especially by means of the Talmudic hermeneutics – a positive image of corporality; the second one, marked by the fundamental ideas of Hellenistic anthropology, focuses on the inconceivable distance between the body and the soul. In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, a text written in Alexandria between 100 and 50 B.C., the signs of this influence are obvious but without becoming dominant over the entire Jewish anthropology. However – as Olivier Clement points out – the biblical difference between the body and the spirit has nothing to do with the Hellenistic dichotomy between the soul and the body, in spite of the numberless historical confusions which have sometimes suggested that Christianity is a "popular Platonism" [23]. In conclusion, biblical anthropology systematically rejects dualism. The human body is *animated* (însufleţit) and the soul is *embodied* (întrupat), soteriology is not understood as a radical break from the body, but rather as a good harmonization of their relationships [23, p. 98-99].

Some other clarifications of terminology – quite relevant to the successful correction not only of some Platonic-Origenist expressions, but also of some afferent teachings and mentalities – are offered to us by Claude Tresmontant. He states that the Jewish people created a culture whose noetical structure is "wholly original", "the originality of this thinking being only slightly considered in our Occident dominated

by the Greek and Latin culture” [24]. This estrangement from the biblical spirit led to the formation, in the Occident, of an anthropological mentality of Platonic and Neo-platonic essence, with the exception of the Aristotelians in the 13th century. Its deviation can be explained by the fact that when the books of the Old Testament were translated from Hebrew into Greek, the word *nephesh* – which in Hebrew stands for principle of life – was translated by *psyche*, and in Latin by *anima*. The great illusion and mistake, said C. Tresmontant, resides in our imagining that one might switch from one universe of thinking to the other only because of the establishment of a correspondence of terms, which in reality do not share the same meaning. Because the Hebrew Bible has a term which was translated into Greek by *psyche* and in Latin by *anima*, we considered that the biblical term *soul* has exactly the same meaning as the term *soul* used by Plato, Plotinus or Descartes. It is here where the mistake is to be found. Under the identity of terms, in translations, the differences of meaning are radical. Indeed, whereas in the Orphic, Platonic and Neo-platonic traditions the soul has a divine nature and enjoys inherent immortality, being pre-existent to the ‘body’ into which it ‘falls’ as in a prison and seeking to regain freedom as soon as possible in order to return to its origin, in the Hebrew tradition the soul ontologically possesses a different essence than that of God Who created it, and it is not pre-existent to the body [24].

The idea that the existence of the soul inside the ‘body’ would be a misfortune, the consequence of a mistake, is foreign to the Hebrew tradition. That is why the Jewish has no idea of a substantial duality between the ‘soul’ on the one hand and the ‘body’ on the other hand. In Hebrew there is no word designating the body in the sense Plato or Descartes speak about the body as a different essence from the soul. There is a word designating the corpse, but this is no longer a body. The confusion between the body and the corpse represents the Cartesian error [24, p. 34; 25]. Another confusion arose from the translation of the Hebrew word *basar*, rendered as *sarx* into Greek, as *caro* into Latin, as *chair* into French. “While for the French person of the 20th century, *chair* bears the meaning of body, especially as origin of passions, *basar* stands for the human integrity, the living person, which in French are rendered by *ame* and *corps* at the same time” [24, p. 62]. A more convincing proof that in the Hebrew tradition, the human being is understood as an indissoluble psycho-somatic unity is that the functions or affections which, in a dualist anthropology constitute the attributes of the ‘body’, represent the attributes of the *nephesh* in Hebrew: “*My soul is hungry*” (Psalm 107.9), “*My soul is thirsty*” (Proverbs 25.25). “*Nephesh* and *basar* are not two distinctive things, two different essences, as *psyche* and *soma* for Plato, but two words standing for the human being from the point of view of his psycho-somatic organization” [24, p. 63].

Saint John the Evangelist wrote: “The Word became flesh” – *sarx* (*caro*) and not *soma* (*corpus*) in order to clearly show that the Logos assumed the entire human nature (soul-body) according to the Jewish conception regarding the human being. The Church Fathers’ mission at the First, the Third and the Fourth Ecumenical Council was also the salvation of the essence of the biblical thinking, searching for its appropriate terms in Greek: *sarkothenta*, *enanthropesanta* and so on. Therefore, the

Church Fathers avoided Platonic and Neo-platonic terminology, which unfortunately seemed to be present within Western mentality.

The same holistic biblical view can be found in Syriac tradition. In fact, “one of the most striking characteristics of ancient Syriac Christianity in all its forms is its intense physicality. The body provided a central focus of concern for religion in this region, and the primary instrument of religious expression. Throughout the spirituality of the Syrian Orient one finds a heightened awareness of sensory experience, of physical expression, of bodily knowing, of embodiment as the medium in which and by which the encounter between human and divine takes place.” [26] That is why “at the core of early Syriac Christianity lies an unequivocal understanding of the ‘oneness’ of the human person, a oneness of body and soul, in which the physical and the spiritual are essential to one another in relation to God, for neither has meaning without the other. As St. Ephrem marveled, «The soul is Your bride, the body Your bridal chamber». Syriac writers present an eschatological vision of concretely physical nature, experienced in bodily terms.” [26, p. 111]. The separation, or disharmony, of body and soul that we know as mortality is consequently how we experience and know our fallen condition. The body is the place in which salvation happens and the instrument by which it is done. Finally, “the body changed in the eschaton will remain the body in which and through which we know God—and in the eschaton, knowing God will be the total sum of our life. The body fulfils an epistemological role: it is the medium through which we first encounter the divine and it offers knowledge of God through that encounter that cannot be gained in any other way. In early Syriac tradition, embodiment is the condition that defines our existence in time, as it will also define it in eternity.” [26, p. 129] Sebastian Brock, one of the leading specialists in Syriac tradition, wrote a section in one of his books about the value of the human body, stating that: “Saint Ephrem is far from the platonic or dualist tendencies that characterize some tendencies in early Christianity which sought to denigrate the value of the body” [27]. There are three main considerations regarding the value of the body: the biblical one of 1 Corinthians 6.19, the embodiment of the Son of God and the Saint Eucharist.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa also has an integrating conception on human being, “far from the platonic-Manichean conception where the body was considered a prison for the soul. On the contrary, the soul is the active force which permeates the material elements and makes them into a body, the human body.” [28] The soul is not restricted to a single part of the body, but ‘is unspeakably united to each part of the body’. In the human body, matter, through the union with the soul, is subjectivized and personalized. Therefore, “the human body is of great importance in orienting the matter in the direction of the soul. In a person, the mellowness from the material world is filled with the spirit” [28, p. 93].

The ascetic tradition of the Hesychasm is of special significance too, for the way in which it emphasized the importance of the human body. One of the main points is the contrast between the ‘holistic’ biblical anthropology inherent in hesychasm and the ‘dualistic’ platonic and neoplatonic anthropology. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware from Oxford stated: “A body-soul division of a platonic type has no

place within Christian tradition. The Bible sees the human person in holistic terms” [29].

The importance of our bodily nature is underlined in another contribution printed in the same valuable volume from Balamand: “the key to understanding our role in creation and expressing it coherently is our bodily nature. Like many other people today, Orthodox theologians frequently come out strongly against a dualistic view of the human being; they stress the body as the total person’s ‚mode’ of existence. But this is not a matter simply of affirming the authentic dimensions of human existence: the body has a cosmic significance. It is in the body that the sacred liturgy of uniting created and uncreated has its origin and fulfilment, as Yannaras says.” [30]

This wholeness of man is also eloquently put into an onto-theological hierarchy by Father Nicolai Velimirovici in his Hymn LXXII: “*Deliver my soul* from self-delusion, my God, so that my body may also be delivered from bodily sin. Deliver my soul from foolish arrogance and burning anger, and my body will neither behave foolishly nor burn. The soul designed the body to be a portrait of herself, to be the organ of her speech. The body is mute and inert, either for good or for evil, if the soul will not speak. The body knows nothing of adultery, if the soul does not tell it. Adultery is carried out in the heart; the body only repeats in its clumsy way what has been woven with fine threads in the mysterious chambers of the heart.” [31]

The biggest risks in the excessive preoccupation for the body is hedonistic-psychological. Because the values of early Church were lost, Western world suffers from an inherent unbalance in the theological rapport to body and soul in the economy of salvation. The first age of European thinking indicates a preeminence of the Platonic soul to the corporal’s detriment, culminating in mutilation of the body of the medieval Catholic monasticism; then modernity brought hedonism against the life of the soul. „Religion has received increasing attention in the psychological research line centred on the concept of ‘body image’, generally defined as a «multidimensional construct that refers to subjective perceptual and attitudinal experiences about one’s body, particularly one’s physical appearance». In this array of psychologically protective characteristics, religion has also been taken into account as a potential defence against the negative influences of the sociocultural beauty standards on one’s self-perception.” [32]

The Orthodox-Christian view finds some correspondence to some of the philosophical or religious unchristian ideas regarding the metaphysical significance of the body. Plotin, for instance, speaks about a balance between the soul and the body which is a characteristic of the Oriental thinkers. Thus, “the moral evil within us, which comes from the association with the body, must be attributed rather to form than to matter since bodies get their particular character from the form, the answer is that forms are the source of ignorance, not as far as they are pure, but as far as they are mixed with matter” [33]. In his opinion, the soul is a mediator between the intelligible and the sensible part of the human being. The philosopher speaks about the act of descent into body in two ways; the first, in the sense of descent into body as birth, the second, as a union to the One, a descent from the transcendent Intellect, a union which occurs beyond the intelligible. The union to the One, in Plotin, occurs in the Intellect

which is in that apophatic *within* that all mystics confess to. The soul must participate to the sensory part of the being, but it must also at the same time maintain herself within the intelligible realm and “it is not proper that it should bear anger on itself, if not all remain for the best, *considering the fact that the Soul is the middle part in the order of existence*, belonging of course to the Divine part, *but being at the frontier/the inferior/of the intelligible*” [34].

We can also consider the Upanishads anthropology and metaphysics which describe the body in an antinomic key. Man is made of mind and its components: sensory part, active organs, body and world. The supreme temptation on man is that to identify himself, through his passions, to the body until they are the same thing and thus implicitly to the world. The body, as the world, is a temporary shelter for the soul, but it actually proves to be of extreme importance in the human being progress. Moreover, the importance of the body is given by its uniqueness in the course of life, which implies the singularity of the experience it can bestow upon the being in the initiation path to the absolute. In the Upanishads, the body is presented as a condition *per se* for the mainly positive experience of man. “In fact, the body mediates any link of the Self to the Universe, thus, anything the Self experiments is dependent upon the body” [35]. The same idea can be found in *Advaita Vedānta* regarding the ontological and indispensable role which the body has in the evolution of man [36].

4. The human body: 'translucent organ of God's infinite mystery'

When Father Stăniloae writes about the Son of God's incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection and bodily ascension to Heaven, when he makes an introduction to the Holy Mysteries and in the chapter on eschatology, too, Father Stăniloae also refers to the importance and the value of the human body. It is worth rendering some texts which speak for themselves by the depth of the content as well as by the beauty of expression.

Father Stăniloae states that: “the human body is a palpable, concrete, special rationality, in connection with the palpable, concrete rationality of nature. It represents the most complex system of plasticized rationality.” [37] “The human body is neither merely matter, nor merely plasticized rationality as an object, but subjectified matter, taking part in the subject as a subject. In the reality of my body there is something which transcends what might be called its materiality and its simply automatic movements, something that cannot be reduced to its material properties. There is a partial non-objectivity of the body.” [37, p. 367] “But Christ, becoming man made up of soul and body, showed us the value God is granting to the human body, also called by resurrection to eternity” [38]. “Christ, as Son of God's union with mankind in a certain moment of history, is sealed as virtual in our very nature. The fact that only by the human nature assumed in His Hypostasis is the Son of God close to us and conveyable to the maximum. This means that the human nature is the most adequate medium by means of which God conveyed Himself to us, or that God created the human nature as His icon and the most conveyable organ with human beings, they virtually having Christ in themselves.” [38, p. 26] ”In the human body assumed by the Son of God there is to be found the ground and the spring of sanctification of the

whole material cosmos and out of Him we ourselves receive power in order to collaborate, through our very body, to the sanctification of the cosmos" [38, p. 151]. "To feel the communication with the incarnated Son of God, means to feel the divine life lived by Him in His body" [38, p. 27] because in Christ "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily - *somatikos pan to pleroma tes theotetos*" (Colossians 2.9).

In his discussion of the *Metamorphosis* on Mount Tabor, Father Stăniloae stresses again the value of the human body: "Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the anticipated proof of the light of the Holy Trinity that shall emanate from His resurrected body and the bodies of all who show their faith in their deeds" [39].

In the sacrifice of life, the bodily death for others "is shown another value conferred to the body: that of assuring the eternity of man accepting the bodily sacrifice" [38, p. 95]. But the Saviour's Sacrifice offers the positive sense of death: "The Son of God, incarnating, makes use even of the death in order to defeat it. He overturns the sense of death. Instead of means of passing to the lowest degree of life, it is used by Him as means of defeating it and of entering as man in the eternal life. God offers this way in His incarnated Son a positive sense even to death." [38, p. 186] Following Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Father Stăniloae writes several times that in front of God the Father we do not have access unless we are in the state of pure sacrifice, both in the sense of delivering ourselves up to God's will and of consecrating ourselves to the service of people, and even in a physical sense, as it is the case of martyrs and heroes. The value of the sacrificed body also comes from the fact that the bodies of the martyrs become saint relics, which represent a sign of the eternal intrinsic value of the body, too. In fact, in the mystery of the sacrifice we acknowledge the concept of full giving ourselves in spiritual and ontological terms, never in the sense of conjectural human morality. This is the reason why *breaking apart one's body* in the act of organ donation to save human lives is a present theme for today's Theology as a sacrifice in its essential sense; it is a communion gesture. „From an etymological point of view, the concept of sacrifice directly suggests the idea of devotion.” [40]

"In the greatest intimacy and efficiency the Word of God revealed immortality as plenitude of life by His bodily resurrection [and ascension]. Since once man was created by God the Word, not as reason without body, but as reason in body and in the context of the world, in Him is given the power of coming down to men in the form of the human body in order to resurrect them with the body or to offer them immortality in their integral being, made up of soul and body. If the Son of God hadn't come down to us incarnated, even the right men in the Old Testament would have remained in an imperfect immortality, because they couldn't have resurrected with the body. And man's life is not complete without body." [38, p. 26-27]

In the section on the 'teandric constitution of the Church', Father Stăniloae underlined the fact that: "if the Son of God had not become flesh and had not deified it through the Resurrection and Ascension, an essential link would have missed between God and creation" [41]. "The holy Mysteries emphasize, the same way as God's incarnation, *the huge importance of the human body and its eternal value as transparent medium of the divine richness and depths*. Sanctifying the body means sanctifying the soul, too, or making it a more and more transparent medium and a more and more adequate organ of God's presence. Any bodily gesture has

repercussions on the spiritual life and any thought or feeling reverberates in the body... It is impossible to totally pull out of the soul the roots of the body, as much as it is impossible to look upon the body as mere matter.” [37, vol. 3, p. 16] A man in his spiritualized body is able not only to influence his neighbour, but also to imprint spiritually the material nature around him. Therefore, a spiritualized body becomes a transparent body, going more and more beyond its biological life, turning it into spiritual feelings and sensing and stamping the entire creation seen through the power of the free rational spirit in it [38, p. 40]. “The resurrected bodies remain unchanged from the point of view of their being, but they are to be transfigured by the Holy Spirit. However, Christianity believes in an eternity of the matter, transfigured by the power and infinite richness of the spiritual life and by the divine energies. Christianity admits a kind of *mystical materialism* and knows a *holy matter*. Since God’s body is holy by whose reception our bodies gain holiness.” [37, vol. 3, p. 415] Here we have the most unexpected possible answer to the atheist propaganda, to the so-called scientific materialism, to the idolatry of matter.

5. Conclusion

The value of the body can be summed up in the six points – the number echoes the six days of Creation - discussed by Jean-Claude Larchet in his book *This is My Body...* In his opinion, the body is a stairs which makes ever present the ascent of man towards the Second Coming in his double condition, the first a primordial one and the second a restored one. The stages of the body-stairs in Larchet are as follows: ‘the first condition of the body’, ‘the body of sin’, ‘the saved deified body through the Embodiment of the Word of God’, ‘the purpose of the body in the spiritual life’, ‘the transformed and deified body, the body of praise’ and ‘the death and resurrection of the body’ [42, 43].

On this ontological stairs, one can decipher the fact that the body is meant for the eschatological grace and that *the embodiment* had been foretold, before Creation, to come about at the fulfilment of time (*kairos*, Galatians 4.4), since the perfecting of man is the union to the Logos made man. Falling into sin caused the way and the conditions of the embodiment to be changed, not the change of the embodiment itself [44]. Moreover, through the Holy Mysteries, there is a recreation both at a micro - and to a macro - level of the Universe where one can see the *raison d’être* of the body within the spiritual life of man, a purpose which is forgone by man because of sin, but which is possible for the restored man in Christ.

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