

## The Body in Christianity on the Basis of the Crisis of the Corporeal in Modern Culture

Olga Dolska , Jakov Tararoyev , Tetyana Dishcant 

*National Technical University “Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute”, Kharkiv, Ukraine*

### ANNOTATION

This article is devoted to the meanings and practises of the body in Christian culture and the issue of preserving and continuing this tradition in modern culture. Since it is about the semantic contexts of the body, the article uses the phenomenological method in combination with hermeneutic analysis. The authors consistently deploy several logical lines. The first line is related to the description of such a direction as hesychasm, its practises and attitude toward the body. At the same time, the ethical potential of hesychasm and the pathos of physicality as an instrument of morality are emphasised. The second line revolves around the practical attitude to the body in modern culture: the preservation of the Christian tradition, the natural characteristics of the body, and understanding the meaning of the body. The third line is connected with the loss of the “sanctity” of the body and the unawareness of this loss on the part of the common citizen and, as a result, the erosion of the ethical and natural meaning of the body. According to the authors, history will show how terrible these changes in meaning can be.

**Keywords:** hesychasm, Christian tradition, meanings of the body, transgender, sports competitions, pathos of the body, modern culture.

### INTRODUCTION

**Relevance.** The body has always been of vital importance to humans. However, the meanings that our civilisation has endowed it with are subject to great transformations, sometimes simply terribly “distorted”. The consequences of such processes will undoubtedly affect people’s worldview, and their attitudes to each other and themselves in the future. We would like to deal with the semantic basis of understanding the body based on the Christian tradition, specifically by reflecting on the tradition of hesychasm. In our opinion, it is the religious context that provides not only an explanation of the significance of the body for a person but also allows us to delve into the context of its essential characteristics.

Today, the events that unfold around the topic of the corporeal directly and indirectly touch on the topic of human relations and, as a result, there is a need to once again talk about the role and significance of the body in the Christian tradition and about the consequences of ignoring the biblical commandments in modern everyday life.

**Methodology.** Two methodological approaches are taken as a basis: phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology tries to substantiate knowledge about an object, but under new conditions, it is things that must manifest themselves to consciousness as a result of phenomenological work. Phenomenology as a description of the semantic structures of consciousness is effective in philosophy, in linguistics, in psychology, and even psychiatry. The first readers of E. Husserl were M. Merleau-Ponty, J.-P. Sartre, P. Ricoeur, E. Levin, J. Derrida, etc (Zalta et al, 2018). Phenomenology describes thoughts, and transforms them, contributing to the description of the transformations of thoughts into knowledge (subjective, “my knowledge” into universally significant) and thereby emphasising the “duality of

consciousness.” B. Waldenfels (2006) actively uses this term to emphasise the multidimensionality of the world. This is a kind of statement of the difference between me and the other: this is the basis of the life world – there is my world, there is the world of the Other, and the relationship between me and the alien self is built in the world. Category “lifeworld” Husserl makes it possible not only to capture the world of interaction between me and the Other but also to build a world of everyday life that unfolds before us the beauty of life itself. This is the prerequisite for ethics and the root of our everyday life. Phenomenology also expands on the theory of the sensuous and thus emphasises the special status of the body in the life world. In combination with hermeneutics, phenomenology reveals the special significance of the body for the Christian tradition and makes it possible to realise the crisis of the corporeal in modern everyday life.

**Purpose.** To clarify the meanings of the corporeal, based on the tradition of hesychasm.

**Novelty.** The “distortion” of the meaning of the body in modern cultures makes it possible to emphasise the emergence of the phenomenon of unconsciousness of paradoxical events, the enormity of the consequences of which few people still understand.

**Results.** The understanding of the world is always based on certain meanings, on the understanding of how to live. Now we are witnessing deep contradictions in absolutely all spheres of life, but they can be grouped into two powerful paradigm lines that will help to understand the powerful conflicts of our time. It is a conflict between man and nature and between man and man. Now technological blocks and logic are disintegrating and the struggle for new logic is unfolding. To what extent such a change is tied to Christian ethics and comes into conflict with its basic tenets will make it possible to realise the depth of such a conflict. We set ourselves several tasks that can be grouped, build a logical connection between them, and allow us to “reveal” those meanings, which will show the ways of their semantic content and, therefore, will allow us to describe these conflicts with the understandable logic of philosophical analysis.

In the Christian tradition, it is always about human flesh. Sometimes someone asks why there is mention of the flesh and very little information about the body. Indeed, in the descriptions of human life, in the rational reflections of the scholastics, and in most of the texts of the Fathers of the Church, we read about the flesh. Christianity has always emphasised the importance of the flesh for the believer as if ignoring the body, the corporeal. But such a trend as hesychasm makes it possible to understand the role of the body in Christian practises because it is the corporeal in it that is regarded as a spiritual core.

Hesychasm is an ethical and ascetic teaching about the path of man to God, the unity of man with God based on “purification of the heart” with tears and the concentration of consciousness in oneself. The path is quite difficult and requires constant physical control and psychological control of oneself. To understand this course, it is necessary to bring your consciousness and idea of yoga practises closer because hesychasm resembles it (the body techniques of hesychasm are compared to the methods of yoga). In a general sense, it is a mystical movement in Byzantium, a system of psychophysical control techniques. The practises of hesychasm included oblique sitting postures, regulation of breathing, blood movement, distrust of involuntary thoughts, reciting the Jesus Prayer a thousand times, etc. The doctrine was created in the IV-VII centuries, and in the XIV century, has undergone restoration.

Among the founders of the movement – Ioan Listvichnik, a few words about this figure. The name was given to him as a result of reading his work “The Stairs That Lead to Heaven”, in which he drew attention to the moral dangers that await the monk. The treatise contained a rich experience of psychological self-control, rich in narrative material. Later it was translated into many languages and was popular among the medieval population of Europe (Greece, Palestine, Syria, Serbia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Russia, and other countries). But the systematiser of hesychasm should be considered Gregory Palamas. He received a good education and possessed the logical and conceptual apparatus of Aristotle. He was familiar with Plato’s tools (this can be explained by the fact that Plato was studied after Aristotle). The main part of his life was spent on Mount Athos. Here he showed an interest in ascetic reform, he participated in the Palamite disputes, which was called “the general great and last ideological conflict in Byzantium” (Аверинцев, 2006).

Working with the body presupposed the moral fortitude of the monk. Recall that the beginning of reflection on morality is found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, and Christianity. Modes of ethical conceptualisation were proposed by Socrates and Platon. Aristotle became the founder of ethics as a trend in Western philosophy and the author of the first major treatises on it (Nicomachean Ethics, Great Ethics, and Eudemic Ethics). The reasoning of Socrates, then of Platon, laid the foundations of the rational way of moral theorising as a method of comprehending the world, living in it, searching for moral values, etc. The object of the study of ethics was morality.

The Bible made it possible to understand the role of man's spiritual life and laid the foundations for the special significance of the body in this process. The story of the outcome of the Jews from Egypt acquires metaphorical sacred semantics in the sacred texts: a person goes beyond the framework of everyday existence, earthly existence (in Kabbalah, Egypt symbolises the body) into the spiritual world, into the realm of the spirit. The union of man with God is built in the paradigm of personal dialogue: on this basis, all Abrahamic or theistic religions exist to this day). The Jewish sacred groups of books (Torah, Prophets, Scriptures) that together make up the Tanakh records, tell and regard this story as a law about the two fundamental feelings of man towards God – love for Him and fear of God. God is in no way connected or identified with the objects of the physical cosmos. It is no longer a pantheistic paradigm in which there is no personal appeal to God on the part of man. We are facing a new world in which the presence of God is affirmed not only by His supermundane power but also by His transcendental interpretation of the Absolute. A vertical axis is formed, which acquires axiological significance, the semantic content of which is realised in the dialogue between man and God, the spark of which is always present in the consciousness of man.

According to Palamas, the ascetic hesychast at the pinnacle of spiritual ascent in this world directly perceives the uncreated (“that which is not created”) radiation of the very divinity of God. He insists that the contemplation of God is not a speculative process, but the action of grace, which is carried out through the sense of sight, that is, through the human body. It is the latter (flesh) that becomes “God-worshippers”. With the help of Aristotle's tools, Palamas develops the doctrine of the difference between the essence of God and His “energies”: the essence is in itself inaccessible, while the energies permeate the world and are communicated to man through the body. The very unity of the essence is preserved in the diversity of these energies (Аверинцев, 2006). Thus, the anthropology of Palamas includes complex psychological observations. His interpretation of the Bible focuses on the possibility of spiritual enlightenment, on the claim that the human spirit is godlike precisely because of its ability to “give life” to the body, in contrast to the disembodied spirit of the angels. The body becomes an important component, a component on the way to the Absolute. The energies nourish the human being immanently, by which the body receives the path to the transcendent. In this context, the body acquires the meaning of the sacred at the level of the human spirit, for the body itself is the home not only of the soul but also of the spirit.

Recall that in the religious Christian tradition, there is such a type of human transformation as holiness, the main meaning of which is the participation of a person in God, his deification, in his transformation under the influence of the grace of God. The basis of this restoration is Christ's perception of human nature, that is, of the bodily incarnation of God. Christians, imitating Christ, participate in his Divinity through grace and become saints. Thus, the saint is always a manifestation of salvation, of God's mercy to people, of the grace that God sends to His people. In the Acts of Martyrdom of Perpetua, Felicitia, and Other Victims (*Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis cum sociis*), who were tormented in Carthage in 202 or 203, it is highlighted how Felicitia, shortly before her execution, while already in prison, decided to share her spiritual experiences and offer guidance to fellow prisoners. The birth was so difficult that the soldiers guarding her asked: “If you suffer so much now, what will happen to you when you are handed over to the beasts?” Felicitia replied: “Now I suffer because I suffer for myself, and then I will suffer for the other (i.e. Christ) and that other will be in me and suffer for me”. The feat accomplished by the saints is thus considered not so much as the achievement of the saint himself, but as an act of God's grace, as a manifestation of Divine Providence (Живов, 2005).

The doctrine of the intercession of saints is based on the concept of one Church of the living

and the dead, which is the Body of Christ. Physical death does not cut off the believer from the Church community, and therefore, since ancient times, prayers for the dead have been established in the Church. These prayers, according to Church teaching, are beneficial for the dead and contribute to their salvation. As St. John wrote in St. John Chrysostom “It is not in vain that there are offerings for the dead, not in vain are prayers, not in vain are almsgiving: all this was established by the Holy Spirit, desiring that we should benefit through one another” (ЖИВОВ, 2005). In the same way, the saints, having been born through their dormition to eternal life, continue to be in the Church community and can act as intercessors for it and for individual believers who turn to them for intercession.

Modern culture begins to interpret the role of the body differently and makes adjustments to the interpretation of categories, the meanings of which are transparent and understandable to everyone. The Age of Enlightenment shaped the man of industrial society, or, as he was usually characterised by representatives of the ideology of education, the rational man. The ideal developed by the Enlightenment retains its autonomism, but to a large extent loses its naturalistic and hedonistic character, turning into a kind of non-religious asceticism. Western culture of the modern era paid special attention to the “new” man, the man of a post-industrial, information-based society. It is no coincidence that the entire culture was based on rationalism since this type of man was formed under its banner as the leading trend of the time. However, the slogan “religion-culture” in the same period began to acquire completely new shades, and morality (which we traditionally call “normative”) began to simply emasculate.

As an example, here is a small piece of text from the play B. Shaw’s “Pygmalion”. One of Doolittle’s characters (a simple garbage collector and a constant drunkard) became the owner of a huge share of money on the condition that he give up to six lectures a year in the League of Moral Reform. As a result, he “grew up” to be the most original moralist in all of England. Here is a small excerpt from “Pygmalion”:

“Pickering. Don’t you have any morals, man?”

Doolittle (without batting an eyelid): “And you wouldn’t be able to afford them if you were as poor as I am. Well, you know, it’s not like I’m plotting anything against anyone. But if Lisa gets something here, then let me get a little bit too.”

Higgins (concerned): “I don’t know what to do, Pickering. There may be a question of indulging him: From a moral point of view, it would be a crime to give this man at least a farthing. And yet I feel a crude justice in his demand (Шой, 1912).”

The very worldview of man in the industrial world is increasingly moving away from both philosophical and Christian pursuits and turning into a kind of non-religious asceticism. In the latter, the body does not play such a powerful role as was discussed in hesychasm. The body begins to lose its value as sanctimony, as God-given essence. Moreover, in our opinion, there is a “distortion” of the foundations of understanding that are so important for humanity (first of all, which have Christian content). At the beginning of the twentieth century, some events were directly and indirectly tied to the change of meanings. As an example, we took the ethical contexts of the representative of phenomenological anthropologist M. Scheler. M. Scheler’s (2014) reflections on morality and values prevail over the philosophy of war. He believes that there was a disorientation of the Germans on moral (and at the same time religious) questions (Scheler, “Formalism in Ethics and the Material Ethics of Value”). In his opinion, it was impossible to compensate for the loss of moral agreement in the understanding of the use of technical means and doing business. Therefore, Scheler placed emphasis and bet on the German people, on their unity and the Christian spirit (Scheler, 2014). It was this that gave him the strength to emphasise English utilitarianism (the English are the ancestral people of capitalism). To the principles of liberal economics, rooted in English capitalism, Scheler contrasts German solidarity and Christian socialism (Малинкин, 2022). In the book “The Genius of War”, Scheler provides a table of categories of English thinking, which demonstrates the substitution of concepts: culture is replaced or compared with comfort, Divine Providence with the politics of England, decency with mannerism, personality with the gentleman, Christian love with humanity, the public with the community, love for the weak with hatred of the strong, the voice of God with public opinion, European unity with the European balance of power, and so on (Scheler, 2010).

Incidentally, Scheler criticises the old Neoplatonic vision of the “body as the prison of the soul,” which he says Bergson approved, and which reduces bodily functions to material and pragmatic ones, neglecting their instrumental role. On the contrary, Scheler sees the body as a condition for the development of personal actions and spiritual potential. Thus, for Scheler, the ancient dualism of body and soul (in his modern version, the physical-psychic dichotomy) can be overcome by analysing the phenomenological unity of the individual, a unity that precedes any constitutive stratification (Piazza, 2012).

We see that Europe has chosen the path of secular civilisation, and there have been views that radically deny the transcendence of God, and the adherents of these trends proceeded from Nietzsche’s formula: “The old God is dead.” Being in such positions, Protestant theology is already losing its identity, turning into one of the types of mental “bead play” characteristic of modern art. In a situation of permissiveness, false moralism is formed. One of the powerful factors in confirming this thesis is the attitude towards homosexuality, which in the Christian environment has always been called sexual perversion and evaluated negatively. Today we see the phenomenon of the need to “protect” it on the part of society and Christian communities as a “sexual minority”. The Bible leaves no room for such an approach, but the question of intercession for the persecuted in the person of “sexual minorities” raises the degree and acuteness of the issue, since the mercy or tolerant attitude of believers to the right of lesbians or homosexuals to sanctify their relations before the face of the Church on a par with Christian marriage passes the very “normative” morality. Such relations are an excess of misdirected moralism, ready to fight with enthusiasm for the rights of others (understood by the ideology of “human rights” elevated to the Absolute).

The situation with transgender preferences also underscores the rejection of Christian-based morality. We are dealing with secular, civic moralism. And yet, the absurdity of the present lies in the fact that such relations are given an absolute character in the context of the space of spiritual problems. Sometimes the idea is imposed that modern man does not need to accept the idea of God, or if he does, it is without it obliging man to do something, and any moral commandment (or maybe some ritual indication) seems outdated and naïve. All of these signs point to one thing: the “white man” civilisation is increasingly revealing traits that are incompatible with Christianity. Against this background, such things as sports competitions no longer look wild. The application goes to rivalry in the fight between women, and a man of enormous stature enters the ring and declares to everyone, that his body feels perfect in a different way, and he is a woman in status. And this “female body”, which should be feminine in terms of its physiological indicators, begins a battle with a true woman. The sight is indescribably disgusting. But its name remains traditional – “sports competitions”. For example, transgender Mac Beggs won a wrestling tournament among girls in the American city of Cypress, defeating his rivals in all four cases with a total score of 55:0 (Агютин, 2017). It is impossible to replace nature, so these competitions were held without a chance for the participating girls.

Today, in the words of the apostle Paul: “Be not compared with this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Ukrainian Bible, 1962). For some reason “do not fit” into the context of modernity. Because there is a “distortion” of the meaning of the body and with it a loosening of the mind. And the question of bodily austerity arises: If a Hesychast monk did elaborate bodily exercises that not only led him away from sin but cleared the way to transcendence and strengthened the spirit (earlier it might have been said, “and with it faith”), so what role does a homosexual assign to his body in modern culture?

**Conclusions.** In the article, it was shown that the body and its meaning have a special ethical pathos because its understanding was formed under the enormous influence of Christianity, which laid the foundations for the formation of the context of the general civilisational development of mankind. Modern culture “distorts” the meaning of the body, and the actual material of sports competitions makes it possible to record the phenomenon of unawareness in most people that there is a departure from universal values (this is what is called a crisis of culture). Based on such conclusions, several questions arise. History moves in such a way that sometimes it is impossible to trace the trajectories of its development. And yet, despite the incomprehensible lines of development, does the question of the relationship with the Absolute remain relevant for man? If the Christian meanings of the body fade into the background of life, then what other religion will be able to promote the ideas of ethics and morality?

## REFERENCES

1. Аверинцев, С. (2006). *Собрание сочинений. Словарь*. Киев: Дух и літера, с. 912.
2. *Bibliia. Ukrainian Bible*. (1962). Ohienko. <https://www.wordproject.org/bibles/uk/index.htm>.
3. Piazza, A. (2012). *Philosophical News. Introduction, Max Scheler. Über Leib und Seele*, 16–31. [https://www.academia.edu/14071641/Max\\_Scheler\\_%C3%9Cber\\_Leib\\_und\\_Seele](https://www.academia.edu/14071641/Max_Scheler_%C3%9Cber_Leib_und_Seele).
4. Scheler, M. (2010). *Der Genius Des Krieges Und Der Deutsche Krieg (1915)*. German Edition, 458.
5. Scheler, M. (2014). *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 872.
6. Waldenfels, B. (2006). *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden (Graue Reihe)*. Publisher Suhrkamp Verlag, 134.
7. Zalta et al. (2018). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford university, Stanford, CA.
8. Живов, В. М. (2005). *Святость. Краткий словарь агиографических терминов*. [https://azbyka.ru/svyatost-kratkij-slovar-agiograficheskix-terminov#ch\\_0\\_2\\_34](https://azbyka.ru/svyatost-kratkij-slovar-agiograficheskix-terminov#ch_0_2_34).
9. Малинкин, М. (2022). *Макс Шелер. К психологии английского этоса и лицемерия*. Москва, Московский союз литераторов, 144 с.
10. *Трансгендер выиграл турнир по борьбе среди девушек в США* (2017). <https://isport.ua/>.
11. Шоу, Б. (1912). *Пигмалион*. E-book: <https://dovidka.biz.ua/pihmalion-chytaty-bernard-shou/>.

## The Body in Christianity on the Basis of the Crisis of the Corporeal in Modern Culture

Olga Dolska, Jakov Tararoev, Tetyana Dyshkant

*National Technical University “Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute”, Kharkiv, Ukraine*

### ABSTRACT

**Relevance of the topic.** The article is devoted to the meanings and practises of the body in Christian culture and the issue of preserving and continuing this tradition in contemporary culture. Since it is about the semantic contexts of the body, the article uses the phenomenological method in combination with hermeneutic analysis.

The authors consistently deploy several logical lines. The first line is related to the description of such a direction as hesychasm, its practises and attitude to the body. At the same time, the ethical potential of hesychasm and the pathos of physicality as an instrument of morality are emphasised. The second line revolves around the practical attitude to the body in modern culture: the preservation of the Christian tradition, the natural characteristics of the body, and understanding the meaning of the body. The third line is connected with the loss of the “sanctity” of the body and the unawareness of this loss on the part of the common citizen and, as a result, the erosion of the ethical and natural meaning of the body. According to the authors, history will show how terrible these changes in meaning can be. The “distortion” of the meaning of the body in modern cultures makes it possible to emphasise the emergence of the phenomenon of unconsciousness of paradoxical events, the enormity of the consequences of which few people still understand.

**The problem.** Today, the events that unfold around the topic of the corporeal directly and indirectly touch on the topic of human relations and, as a result, there is a need to once again talk about the role and significance of the body in the Christian tradition and about the consequences of ignoring the biblical commandments in modern everyday life.

**The purpose.** To clarify the meanings of the corporeal, based on the tradition of hesychasm.

**Research object.** The role and significance of the body in the Christian tradition and about the consequences of ignoring the biblical commandments in modern everyday life.

**Results.** In the article, it was shown that the body and its meaning have a special ethical pathos because its understanding was formed under the enormous influence of Christianity, which laid the foundations for the formation of the context of the general civilisational development of mankind. Modern culture “distorts” the meaning of the body, and the actual material of sports competitions makes it possible to record the phenomenon of unawareness in most people that there is a departure from universal values (this is what is called a crisis of culture). History moves in such a way that sometimes it is impossible to trace the trajectories of its development. And yet, despite the incomprehensible lines of development, does the question of the relationship with the Absolute remain relevant for a man? If the Christian meanings of the body fade into the background of life, then what other religion will be able to promote the ideas of ethics and morality?

**Keywords.** Hesychasm, Christian tradition, meanings of the body, transgender, sports competitions, the pathos of the body, contemporary culture.

## Kūnas krikščionybėje remiantis kūniškumo krize šiuolaikinėje kultūroje

Olga Dolska, Jakov Tararoyev, Tetyana Dishcant

*Nacionalinis technikos universitetas „Charkivo politechnikos institutas“, Charkivas, Ukraina*

### ANOTACIJA

Straipsnis skirtas kūno reikšmėms ir praktikoms krikščioniškoje kultūroje bei šios tradicijos išsaugojimo ir tęsimo šiuolaikinėje kultūroje klausimui. Kadangi kalbama apie kūno semantinius kontekstus, straipsnyje naudojamas fenomenologinis metodas kartu su hermeneutine analize.

Autoriai nuosekliai diegia kelias logines eilutes. Pirmoji eilutė yra susijusi su tokios krypties kaip hesichazmas aprašymu, jo praktika ir požiūriu į kūną. Kartu pabrėžiamas hesichazmo etinis potencialas ir fiziškumo kaip moralės instrumento patosas. Antroji eilutė sukasi apie praktinį požiūrį į kūną šiuolaikinėje kultūroje: krikščioniškos tradicijos išsaugojimą, natūralias kūno savybes, kūno prasmės supratimą. Trečioji eilutė susijusi su kūno „šventumo“ praradimu, bendru piliečio nežinojimu apie šią netektį ir dėl to kylančią etinės ir natūralios kūno prasmės eroziją. Pasak autorių, istorija parodys, kokie baisūs gali būti šie prasmės pokyčiai. Kūno prasmės „iškraipymas“ šiuolaikinėse kultūrose leidžia pabrėžti paradoksalių įvykių sąmonės reiškinio atsiradimą, kurio pasekmes nedaugelis žmonių vis dar supranta.

**Raktažodžiai:** hesichazmas, krikščioniška tradicija, kūno reikšmės, translytiškumas, sporto varžybos, kūno patosas, šiuolaikinė kultūra.

Gauta 2023 06 07  
Priimta 2023 07 05