THE ETHICAL CONSIDERATION OF BODY MODIFICATION: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TATTOOING AND BODY PIERCING PRACTICES BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVES

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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I will keep this short.

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Abstract

Angelos Mavropoulos

The Ethical Consideration of Body Modification: A Comparative Case Study of Tattooing and Body Piercing Practices between Catholic and Orthodox Perspectives

Due to the sceptical or even negative stance of the academic world towards body modification practices, especially tattooing and body-piercing, the scholarly attention they have received is inversely proportional to their popularity. Scholarly scepticism is even greater within academic moral theology, as Church Fathers, Church representatives, and Christian ethicists have not dealt with the moral evaluation of body modification, while none of the two original Christian traditions, the Catholic and the Orthodox, has expressed official positions on the topics of tattooing and piercing specifically. The ultimate goal, therefore, of this study is to determine whether or not Orthodox and Catholic Christian ethics could take up a position to accept tattooing and piercing as interventions that are made to the human body. Based on pre-modern and modern literature of both Christian denominations and considering each one's viewpoint on the human body and humanity's relation towards it, the research attempts to compare and contrast Orthodox and Catholic perspectives by understanding and presenting their similarities and differences on the subject. This work is multidisciplinary and doubly innovative. First, it analyses a topic that has not been analysed in the past, that of the ethical consideration of tattooing and body-piercing from the standpoint of Christian ethics and bioethics, contributing to the field of moral theology. Even more, it is a comparative work between Orthodox and Catholic perspectives, thus, it is also a Comparative Theology study, with the ultimate ambition to contribute to inter-Christian communication and ecumenical dialogue and respect. Regarding its conclusions, the thesis demonstrates marked differences in emphasis, terminology, and methodology between the two traditions. However, it also reveals that, in terms of ethics, and specifically of the ethics of tattooing and body piercing, their similarities are far more than one might have initially expected.

INTRODUCTION

Tattooing and body piercing are 'a popular form of body art that have been practised throughout history by various cultures.'[1] The two body modification practices, often mentioned together in the relevant literature, have been applied all around the world since antiquity, while they gained popularity in the Western world during the second half of the 20th century, popularity that still keeps gradually increasing. However, due to the sceptical or even negative stance of some of the academic world towards them, the truth is that the scholarly attention they have received is inversely proportional to their popularity. As Swami and Harris point out, despite the evident mainstreaming of body modification, the topic has received little scholarly interest, possibly because it has been academically viewed as "a deviant interest in deviance".'[2] Regardless, however, of the little attention these two forms of body modification have received, some academic works have been written about them, most of which do not deal with them exclusively, but include them in their long list of body modification practices. Some of these works are Mike Featherstone, *Body Modification*; Arnold Rubin, *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human* Body; Clinton R. Sanders and D. Angus Vail, *Customizing the Body-The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, Erich Kasten, *Body-Modification: Psychologische und Medizinische Aspekte von Piercing, Tattoo, Selbstverletzung und Anderen Körperveränderungen*; Michael Atkinson and Kevin Young, 'Flesh Journeys: Neo Primitives and the Contemporary Rediscovery of Radical Body Modification'; Will Johncock, 'Modifying the Modifier: Body Modification as Social Incarnation'; and Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe, *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment-The Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text.*

Although the fact that these practices get increasingly popular, especially among younger people, makes the need for Christian ethics to address them more imperative than ever, scholarly scepticism is even bigger within academic moral theology. Generally, Church Fathers, Church representatives, and Christian ethicists have not dealt with the moral evaluation of body modification, while none of the

[1] Beth Kapes, 'Piercing and Tattoos', in *The Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine, Vol. 4*, ed. by Jacqueline L. Longe (New York: Thomson/Gale, 2002), pp. 2598-2600 (p. 2598).
[2] V Swami and AS Harris, 'Body Art: Tattooing and Piercing', in *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, ed. by Thomas F. Cash (London: Elsevier, 2012), pp. 58-65 (p. 58).

two original Christian traditions, the Catholic and the Orthodox,[3] has expressed official positions on the topics of tattooing and piercing specifically. This has led to varying theological views on the matter, since, for some, body modification is evil, 'as denying the goodness of the body that God has provided,' while, for others, the prohibition of such practices, 'as positive expressions of personal autonomy,' would violate basic human rights.[4] Nevertheless, the human body has been not only appreciated but even glorified by both traditions. Although the American theologian Karen O'Donnell's statement that Christianity is 'a religion of the body,'[5] might be somewhat bold and excessive, Christianity undoubtedly is a religion of both soul *and* body. This is why both Catholic and Orthodox theologies are full of references to the human flesh, its nature, its relationship with the soul, and humanity's proper attitude towards it. Furthermore, relevant concepts, such as the integrity of the human body as well as its beauty and beautification have particularly concerned Christian thinkers over time, whilst viewpoints on the issue of the mutilation of the flesh, albeit not many, have been expressed. These concepts, among others, are examined in the quest of identifying each denomination's ethical considerations on the subject in research.

The ultimate goal, therefore, of this work is to determine whether or not Orthodox and Catholic Christian ethics could take up an explicit position to accept tattooing and piercing as interventions that are made to the human body. Based on pre-modern and modern literature of both Christian denominations and considering each one's viewpoint on the human body and humanity's relation towards it, the research attempts to compare and contrast Orthodox and Catholic perspectives by understanding and presenting their similarities and differences on the subject. Even more, modern bioethics, including modern Christian bioethics too, tend to increasingly deal with issues, such as human enhancement, Transhumanism, and genetic intervention, which, although extremely important and topical, come after body modification. How could I know, after all, whether I am allowed to change my

[3] While Orthodoxy is mainly divided into Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, this paper examines the theological perspectives on the subject at hand largely as they are found in the former. For more on the organisation and the divisions of Orthodox Christianity, see Ronald Robertson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 1999).

[4] Mark J. Cherry, 'Foundations of Christian Bioethics: Metaphysical, Conceptual, and Biblical', *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality*, 29.1 (2023), 2.

[5] Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2019), p. 1.

genome if I do not know whether I can change my body parts? Or how could I answer the question of whether I can go beyond my body's biological capabilities if I do not know whether, and to what extent, I can modify it in the first place? In this regard, the present thesis with its findings not only addresses the critical topic of body modification but will hopefully also be a useful 'tool' for moral theology, both Catholic and Orthodox, to ethically evaluate these contemporary bioethical dilemmas

The work is a comparative one that not only it identifies Catholic and Orthodox views, but also analyses the differences and similarities between the two moral theologies on the matter. Catherine Cornille, in her book *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, stresses that there are two different kinds of comparative theological work: 'a comparative enterprise within the secular study of the history of religions… and comparative theology as a more strictly theological enterprise… which ordinarily studies not one tradition alone but two or more, compared on theological grounds.'[6] Cornille goes on to say that the scholar of the latter (comparative theology) attempts to 'deepen and advance theological truth,' while the one of the former (comparative religion) is primarily driven by curiosity and desire to intellectually understand a particular phenomenon 'in light of a larger whole.'[7] Based on this distinction, the present work belongs to the category of comparative theology, since its goal is not only to historically present the phenomenon of body modification but to theologically delve into it, aiming for a deeper understanding. However, it also examines how the understanding of both traditions has historically evolved over the centuries, as such an effort offers a better picture of the position of both on the subject. Hence, although the dissertation belongs to the 'comparative theology' category, it can be said that it also touches upon the 'comparative religion' one.

In terms of structure, the study begins with a non-theological chapter that analyses body modification in general as well as tattooing, and body piercing more specifically. Biblical research introduces the theological and religious themes of the work, i.e. the presentation of the relevant biblical references, which presents all the biblical passages that are relevant to the subject of the thesis, accompanied by some

[6] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2020), pp. 9-10.
[7] Cornille, p. 10.

first comments and interpretations by representatives of both traditions. After the biblical research, the two separate chapters of theological examination on the issue are presented, as each tradition's pertinent views are individually examined and quoted, in an effort to reach a conclusion about each one's moral views on the subject. The exact same method is followed in both chapters, while each of the two consists of an introduction and four sections. Finally, the next and last chapter, which serves as the conclusion of the dissertation, is the comparison of the examined perspectives. Beyond, however, a mere listing of relevant similarities and differences, this chapter evaluates, synthesizes, and integrates the work's findings in an attempt to contribute to the inter-faith dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Christendom and, hopefully, bring them closer together.

CHAPTER 1: BODY MODIFICATION: THE BASICS

As this work is an interdisciplinary one, this first chapter offers a non-theological analysis of body modification and is divided into three sections: one on body modification in general, one on tattooing, and one on body piercing. Each section presents the historical and social evolution of the respective practices, while the general section also examines the reasons why people engage in body modification, which is crucial for the subsequent moral theological evaluation of these acts. The specific sections on tattooing and body piercing provide detailed information on their application techniques and, most importantly, their medical complications, as 'while piercing and tattooing are popular, both present definite health risks',[1] a factor that obviously plays a particularly important role in their bioethical evaluation. The goal of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with these practices before their moral evaluation follows.

Body modification is defined as 'the (semi-) permanent, deliberate alteration of the human body'[2] and the term is used to designate a wide, heterogeneous group of practices, from simple and 'innocuous' face makeup to rare and controversial sex change. More specifically, the term includes body painting and make-up; hair and nail styling; piercing; body weight and volume changes; the sharpening of teeth; skin discoloration; tattooing; scarification; branding; plastic surgery; hypodermic implantation; the use of prosthetics; deliberate amputations; circumcision; sub penile incision; neck and skull elongation; stretching of various body parts; shrinking (the use of corsetry or other constricting devices); and sex change.[3]

Even though all of these practices constitute bodily modifications, they cannot be considered and examined in a like manner, as a crucial point for their heterogeneity is the element of permanence. Thus, based on this criterion, body modification forms are divided into two main categories, the non-permanent or semi-permanent and the permanent ones.[4] However, since it is true that the element of permanence alone is

[1] Kapes, 2599.
[2] Silke Wohlrab, Jutta Stahl, and Peter M. Kappeler, 'Modifying the Body: Motivations for Getting Tattooed and Pierced', *Body Image*, 4.1 (2007), 87.
[3] Arnold Rubin, 'General Introduction', in *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human* Body, ed. by Arnold Rubin (Los Angeles, California: Museum of Cultural History, 1988), pp. 13-20 (pp. 13-17).
[4] Clinton R. Sanders and D. Angus Vail, *Customizing the Body-The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2007), pp. 3-6.

insufficient to adequately categorise all practices, Margo DeMello's distinction between body adornment and body modification is particularly helpful:

> Body adornment refers to the practice of physically enhancing the body by styling and decorating the hair, painting and embellishing the fingernails, wearing makeup, painting the body, wearing jewellery, and the use of clothing. Body adornments are by definition temporary. Body modification, on the other hand, refers to the physical alteration of the body through the use of surgery, tattooing, piercing, scarification, branding, genital mutilation, implants, and other practices. Body modifications can be permanent or temporary, although most are permanent and alter the body forever.[5]

Body modification has a particularly interesting and ethically controversial background, since it has been playing an important role for civilizations since ancient years. As Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe report, body manipulation, adornment, and mutilation 'have roots reaching far back in the human record, at least 30,000 years.'[6] Nevertheless, in the 1970s, a revival of these practices took place in the United States through the so-called 'movement of Neo Primitivism'. The proponents of the movement, known as 'modern primitives', formed a group that made body modification more widely accepted and reinstated extreme physical modification practices. This resulted in the flourishing of these practices, which, as we shall see, continues to this day.[7] The main purpose of the movement, according to its exponents, is the return to the archetypal freedom, achieved by the escape from the modern, complicated way of living as well as the expression of individuality, since it is a firm conviction of modern primitives that somatic modifications are a way to declare their opposition to the modern culture and environment in which they live.[8]

In most contemporary cultural and social environments, body modification practices are generally viewed positively and considered completely natural. In

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[5] Margo DeMello, *Encyclopedia of Body Adornment* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. xvii.

[6] Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe, 'Introduction: Soft-Tissue Modification and the Horror Within', in *Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment: The Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text*, ed. by Frances E. Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

[7] Michael Atkinson and Kevin Young, 'Flesh Journeys: Neo Primitives and the Contemporary Rediscovery of Radical Body Modification', *Deviant Behavior*, 22.2 (2001), 117-137.

[8] Theresa M. Winge, 'Constructing "Neo-Tribal" Identities through Dress: Modern Primitives and Body Modification', in *The Post-Subcultures Reader*, ed. by David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl (New York; Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), pp. 119-132 (p. 121).

addition, as the phenomena of body alterations, and in particular piercing and tattooing, are increasing, so is the risk involved, as they are applied to more and more imaginative and dangerous parts of the body.[9] This is why, despite their popularity and acceptance, still many people remain sceptical or even disapprove of them, connecting them with physical and mental disorders.[10] Furthermore, many scholars consider them not just modifications but forms of voluntary self-injury and self-mutilation, which constitute critical global health issues.[11] Indeed, although some non-permanent or semi-permanent practices may seem relatively innocuous, the emergence of more extreme modification forms led to the question of where modification ends and where self-harm starts, forcing many scholars to relate body modification with body mutilation. Armando Favazza and David Klonsky, for example, define self-mutilation and self-injury respectively as the deliberate destruction or alteration of one's body tissue without conscious suicidal intent,[12] a definition not awfully dissimilar to that of body modification, while, as Victoria Pitts remarks, body modifiers are often portrayed as potential 'self-hating, ill, and out of control' self-mutilators.[13] Moreover, for Thomas Schramme, there is no substantial difference between the two, since

> It seems that value-judgements regarding interventions into bodily integrity, even the usage of terms like 'mutilation' versus the more neutral 'body modification', are based on nothing more than cultural and probably religious preferences. There seems to be no noticeable qualitative difference between, say, tattoos and aesthetic branding, and there is also no noticeable discrepancy in terms of the inflicted pain or health risk involved.[14]

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[9] Myrna L. Armstrong and Lynne Kelly, 'Tattooing, Body Piercing and Branding are on the Rise: Perspectives for School Nurses', *The Journal of School Nursing*, 17.1 (2001), 13.

[10] Mary Kosut, 'Tattoos and Body Modification', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 24*, ed. by James D. Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), pp. 32-38 (p. 32).

[11] See RJ Lester, 'Self-Mutilation and Excoriation', in *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, ed. by Thomas F. Cash (London: Elsevier, 2012), pp. 724-729 (pp. 724-725).

[12] Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychology* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 17-19; E. David Klonsky, 'Non-Suicidal Self-Injury: An Introduction', *Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session*, 63.11 (2007), 1039.

[13] Victoria Pitts, 'Body Modification, Self-Mutilation and Agency in Media Accounts of a Subculture', in *Body* Modification, ed. by Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 241-251 (p. 243).

[14] Thomas Schramme, 'Should we prevent Non-Therapeutic Mutilation and Extreme Body Modification?', in *The Right to Bodily Integrity*, ed. by A.M. Veins (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 419-426 (p. 420).

On the contrary, other scholars maintain that body modification practices do not constitute self-harm. In the words of David Klonsky, for instance, 'body piercings and tattoos are typically not considered self-injury because they are socially sanctioned forms of cultural or artistic expression.'[15] Nevertheless, for Klonsky, still the line between the two is a thin one, as 'in some cases behaviors that usually fall outside the boundaries of self-injury may indeed represent self-injury if performed with explicit intent to cause tissue damage practices.'[16] Regarding, therefore, the association between body modification and self-injury, several different positions have been expressed. As Jan Sutton reports, for some, all body modifications constitute self-harm, for others their distinction is well-defined, while, for others, the boundaries between the two are not clear-cut. However, in the view of Sutton, their substantial difference is that self-injury and self-mutilation, unlike body modification, are rarely, if ever, carried out for decorative purposes.[17] Finally, Jim Taylor and Lindsey Ibañez, without ruling out their association, summarised the distinction between the two as follows:

> While body modifications are undertaken for a variety of reasons – personal, social, and religious – in each case, the pain inflicted is not the sole objective of the practice. In self-injury, by contrast, the practice itself is the purpose… Furthermore, body modifications are typically carried out by others on a recipient's body, while self-injury is done to oneself, usually in private. Finally, many forms of body modification are socially acceptable, but self-injury is generally taboo. Thus, we conclude that self-injury should not be conceptualized as a body modification practice. Nevertheless, comparisons between self-injury and body modification practices such as tattooing and piercing can be instructive.[18]

The connection between body alterations and fashion is also interesting. For some sociologists, on the one hand, body modification is inextricably linked to the promotion of consumerism by the mass media, which project as 'perfect' the body that has certain proportions and is embellished with all sorts of paintings and

[15] Klonsky, 1040.
[16] Klonsky, 1040.
[17] Jan Sutton, *Healing the Hurt Within: Understand Self-Injury and Self-Harm, and Heal the Emotional Wounds* (Oxford: How To Books, 2005), p. 17.
[18] Jim D. Taylor and Lindsey M. Ibañez, 'Sociological Approaches to Self-injury', *Sociology Compass*, 9.12 (2015), 1007.

ornaments, establishing these practices as fashion symbols.[19] On the other hand, the exact opposite view has been expressed by several thinkers, according to whom, due to their permanence or semi-permanence, several physical alterations, like tattoos, are antithetical to fashion and could not be associated with it, since the latter is characterised as 'a system of continuous and lasting changes.'[20] As David Curry, for instance, articulated, tattooing 'can never be a true fashion… because tattoos cannot be put on and left off by the season',[21] while, for Ted Polhemus, 'any permanent body decoration like a tattoo is as anti-fashion as it is possible to get— literally making change difficult if not impossible.'[22]

The historical desire of human beings to alter their bodies in combination with the contemporary emergence of body modification and the tremendous development of modern science and technology gave rise to the emergence of 'human enhancement' and, eventually, the 'transhumanist movement', which have raised much bioethical concern. Human enhancement is the phenomenon in which humans go beyond their natural bodily limits and capabilities through the application of modern technologies, whilst its most extreme form, Transhumanism, is defined as 'a class of philosophies that seeks the continued evolution of human life beyond its current human form as a result of science and technology guided by life-promoting principles and values.'[23] Regarding human enhancement, therefore, two conflicting sides exist: transhumanists, who advocate for the advancement of various enhancements and the liberty for individuals to embrace radical modifications to themselves; and bioconservatives, who argue against significant alterations to human biology or the fundamental aspects of the human condition.[24] However, it is a fact that the members of the latter category

[19] Josh Adams, 'Bodies of Change: A Comparative Analysis of Media Representations of Body Modification Practices', *Sociological Perspectives*, 52.1 (2009), 105-107.
[20] Paul Sweetman, 'Anchoring the (Postmodern) Self? Body Modification, Fashion and Identity', in *Body* Modification, ed. by Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 51-67 (p. 52).
[21] David Curry, 'Decorating the Body Politic', *New Formations*, 1993.19 (1993), 80.
[22] Ted Polhemus, *Streetstyle* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), p. 13.
[23] Max More and Natasha Vita-More, 'Roots and Core Themes', in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp. 1–2 (p. 2).
[24] Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu, 'Human Enhancement Ethics: The State of the Debate', in *Human Enhancement*, ed. by Nick Bostrom and Julian Savulescu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).

rarely identify as such and that transhumanists themselves labeled anyone who opposes their views as 'bioconservatives'.[25]

The main purpose of Transhumanism is to achieve immortality through the pursuit of the so-called 'morphological freedom', the right not only to self-ownership but also to modify and enhance one's body according to one's desires.[26] Thus, for the advocates of human enhancement and Transhumanism, every individual should be autonomous and free to do whatever they please with their body, while, even more, as Sandberg holds, the 'freedom to modify one's body is essential not just to Transhumanism, but also to any future democratic society.'[27] It is becoming clear, therefore, that, although the Neo-Primitivist and the transhumanist movement, or else, body modification and body enhancement, are not identical, a close connection between the two cannot be denied.[28] One could say that Transhumanism will be the evolution of body modification; the 'limitless' options and opportunities provided by modern progress will lead to the transition from the latter to the former, however, the will of primitive, modern, and future humans to transform their bodies remains unchanged. Nevertheless, body enhancement will not be further analysed, as it is a vast area of bioethical concern in itself.[29]

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[25] Søren Holm, 'The Modification of the Human Body: Controversies', in *Technoscience and Citizenship: Ethics and Governance in the Digital Society*, ed. by Ana Delgado (Cham: Springer, 2016), pp. 49-61 (p. 58).

[26] Anders Sandberg, 'Morphological Freedom – Why We Not Just Want It, but Need It', in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future*, ed. by Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp. 56-65 (p. 57).

[27] Sandberg, p. 56.

[28] For the differences and similarities of body modification with human enhancement and transhumanism as well as for the progression from the former to the latter, see Stefanie Rembold, '"Human Enhancement"? It's all About "Body Modification"! Why We Should Replace the Term "Human Enhancement" with "Body Modification"', *Nanoethics*, 8.1 (2014), 307-315 and Jennifer Huberman, *Transhumanism: From Ancestors to Avatars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[29] Theologically, although Christian theologians are generally against body enhancement, for the Catholic philosopher Benedikt Paul Göcke, who proposed a 'moderate transhumanism' agenda, insofar as human enhancement does not conflict 'with the character of human beings as free and autonomous moral agents,' transhumanism can be viewed as being fully compatible with Christianity. Benedikt Paul Göcke, 'Christian Cyborgs: A Plea for a Moderate Transhumanism', *Faith and Philosophy*, 34.3 (2017), 352. Moreover, the moral theologian James Keenan, based on the Christian notion of perfection, proposed a more 'proactive' stance of Christian ethics toward enhancement, attempting to identify 'an anthropological goal' it might serve. See James F. Keenan, '"Whose Perfection is it Anyway?": A Virtuous Consideration of Enhancement', *Christian Bioethics*, 5.2 (1999), 104-120. For the general stance of Orthodox and Catholic theology on the matter, see Brandon Gallaher, 'Godmanhood vs Mangodhood: An Eastern Orthodox Response to Transhumanism', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.2 (2019), 200–215 and Andrew Pinsent, 'Catholic Perspectives on Human Biotechnological Enhancement', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.2 (2019), 187-199, respectively.

Returning to body modification, further evidence of the continuing rise of its popularity is the creation of a 'church', in the United States, called the 'Church of Body Modification', which numbers more than 3,500 members. Drawing information from its official website, it appears that the church's aim is the strengthening of the relationship between the body, mind, and soul of its members with the ultimate aspiration of approaching the divine element. The official statement of faith of the church is noteworthy:

> We will always respect our bodies. We believe it is our right to explore our world, both physical and supernatural, through spiritual body modification. We promise to always grow as individuals through body modification and what it can teach us about who we are and what we can do. We vow to share our experiences openly and honestly in order to promote growth in mind, body, and soul. We honor all forms of body modification and those who choose to practice in safe and consensual ways. We also promise to respect those who do not choose body modification. We support all that join us in our mission and help those seeking us in need of spiritual guidance. We strive to share a positive message with everyone we encounter, in order to act as positive role models for future generations in the body modification community. We always uphold basic codes of ethics and encourage others to do the same.[30]

1.1. Motivation: Why do People Modify Their Bodies?

What generally distinguishes modern body modification practices from conventional medical procedures is the fact that, although they are carried out for several different reasons, they are, most often, not performed for the purpose of restoring or maintaining one's health.[31] In the relevant literature, much has been said about the several different reasons for which modern men and women turn to body modification; the most significant and common of them will be cited in this chapter.

[30] https://www.churchofbodmod.com/about-us/statement-of-faith/.

[31] Joseph Tarquin Foulkes Roberts, 'Body Modification Practices and the Medical Monopoly', *Social Theory and Practice*, 45.2 (2019), 310.

Beautification

Although bodies are modified for many reasons, the majority of authors and researchers agree that the first and foremost cause of physical interventions is 'the pursuit and attainment of beauty.'[32] The main purpose for modifying the body, therefore, is the desire to increase one's physical attractiveness, while tattooing and body piercing especially belong to the category of mainstream non-enhancing 'decorative' modifications.

Indeed, nowadays, more and more people look after their external appearance on a daily basis and this has evolved into a necessity and a symbol of success in modern societies. Modern adolescents, in particular, see beauty as a crucial prerequisite for social acceptance, whilst people who consider themselves unattractive are often driven to negative feelings, such as sadness, anxiety, and despair. Even more, these feelings often lead to psychological problems, with depression and nervous disorders being the most common.[33] However, it is worth noting that the phenomenon of physical beautification is far from new, as it dates back to prehistoric times,[34] while the ancient Egyptians already had almost all the categories of modern cosmetic products, such as eye shadows, eyeliner, foundation, and pigments for colouring cheeks and lips.[35] As for the skin specifically, although it has always been used as a 'canvas', its beautification gradually became more permanent, from the superficial markings of cosmetics and body art to tattooing, piercing, and scarification.[36] In the words of Sander Gilman, 'To become someone else or to become a better version of ourselves in the eyes of the world is something we all want. Whether we do it with ornaments such as jewelry or through the wide range of physical alterations from hairdressing to tattoos to body piercing, we respond to the demand of seeing and being seen.'[37]

Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that beauty is subjective and it is true that modern psychology has not yet succeeded in defining what exactly is considered

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[32] Erica Reischer and Kathryn S. Koo, 'The Body Beautiful: Symbolism and Agency in the Social World', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33.1 (2004), 297.
[33] TL Brooks, ER Woods, JR Knight, and LA Shrier, 'Body Modification and Substance Use in Adolescents: Is There a Link?', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 32.1 (2003), 44-45.
[34] Bonnie Berry, *The Power of Looks: Social Stratification of Physical Appearance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), p. 17.
[35] R Russell, 'Cosmetics Use: Psychological Perspectives', in *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, ed. by Thomas F. Cash (London: Elsevier, 2012), pp. 366-371 (p. 366).
[36] Berry, p. 61.
[37] Sander L. Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 3.

attractive, as beauty is suggested by the continuous cultural changes. A typical example is the fact that during the 19th century, curves were considered a beauty standard, something that does not apply in the 21st century.[38]

Psychological dimensions of individuality and self-expression

In contemporary societies, external appearance has become essential to defining individual identity.[39] Moreover, as the skin, in particular, is where the self meets the world, tattoos and piercings are one way for this identity and inner self to be expressed and communicated to others. One could say, therefore, that the modification of the body is a strong reflection of a person's perception of his or her own identity or the identity they wish to portray.[40] Thus, one of the most common causes for modifying the body is the discovery of personal identity and the disassociation from the mass, while, even more, this feeling of uniqueness often improves the self-esteem of the individual.[41] According to Sweetman, 'becoming tattooed or pierced can be seen as an act of "self-creation" that, through the modification of the body's surface, helps to construct a viable sense of self-identity,'[42] while, similarly, for Jablonski, especially tattoos, because of their permanence, are a 'uniquely powerful statement of individuality.'[43]

Moreover, during the 1950s and the 1960s, people tended to smoke to demonstrate adulthood and independence from their family environment. Today, this manifestation takes place more and more frequently by resorting to tattoos and other physical interventions, since, in most countries, the legislation prohibits the implementation of such practices to minors without the supervision of a legal guardian. Thus, in modern society, young individuals often view bodily modifications as a representation of the further development of their personal identity and a sign of social maturation.[44]

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[38] See David Frederick, Megan Forbes, Brooke Gentle, Tania Reynolds, and Tia Walters, 'Beauty Standards', in *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality, Vol. 1*, ed. by Patricia Whelehan and Anne Bolin (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 1-5.
[39] Llewellyn Negrin, *Appearance and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 9.
[40] Rebecca Gowland and Tim Thompson, *Human Identity and Identification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 162.
[41] V Swami and AS Harris, 'Body Art: Tattooing and Piercing', in *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, ed. by Thomas F. Cash (London: Elsevier, 2012), p. 61.
[42] Sweetman, p. 62.
[43] Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2013), p. 168.
[44] Erich Kasten, *Body-Modification: Psychologische und Medizinische Aspekte von Piercing, Tattoo, Selbstverletzung und Anderen Körperveränderungen* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 2006), p. 234. Modern

Finally, body modification is the way in which some people aim to project the characteristics of the sex that they identify as. Therefore, straight men try to project their masculinity and manhood, straight women their femininity, whilst homosexuals of both sexes often aim at the opposite result, i.e. similarity with the opposite sex.[45]

Social pressure and social integration

The exact opposite of the search for personal identity and the expression of one's own self is the influence of social norms and social pressure, and regarding physical appearance and bodily alterations, one could say that, in modern society, the paradox of the coexistence of two contradictory trends, individualism and deindividualization, exists. As Llewellyn Negrin highlights, 'The more importance we invest in reading appearances as a sign of individual character and personality, the less they reveal about individuals, as the looks we adopt become more depersonalized.'[46] Similarly, as David Deane interestingly saw, there is not much difference between the seeming, to the Western eye, oppression of an Islamic woman hiding her physical features and the act of men and women transforming their bodies only because the social norms of the West dictate it.[47]

Indeed, often, social role models, such as musicians, actors, models, and so on provide the impetus for the implementation of a physical alteration. More regularly, however, this impulse comes from people in our immediate social surroundings, since maintaining social contacts is one of the most fundamental needs of human nature. In the view of Terrance Turner, especially bodily adornment, in all its forms, is one of the main ways with which individuals are integrated into societies.[48] Hence, people are very likely to alter not only some of their beliefs, but even their bodies, in order to integrate into their society and build recognition relationships with the groups of people to which they belong. The identification with a social group and its demands as well as the manifestation of uniform behaviour often lead people, especially younger ones, to deviant, risky, and self-injurious behaviours with the use of drug substances and body modifications constituting rather common examples, as what

texts written in languages other than English, unless otherwise indicated, are translated directly by the author.

[45] Kasten, p. 243.

[46] Negrin, p. 10.

[47] David Deane, *The Tyranny of the Banal: On the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology* (London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2023), p. 98.

[48] Terrance Turner, 'The Social Skin', *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2.2 (2013), 486.

initially appears to be off-putting may later be regarded positively, through imitation, if the rest of the group condones and integrates it.[49]

Social protest and rebellion

As already mentioned, one of the main reasons why Neo-Primitivists turn to body modification is the defiance of social norms and regulations, as many individuals who want to distance themselves from social stereotypes, protest against them and provoke with their different appearance, resorting to physical interventions. Body modification, therefore, acts as a rebellion against the conservative society, since voluntary self-injury challenges it and opposes its stereotypical standards. Furthermore, a protest expressed through body modifications may target not only the general social 'petty bourgeoism' but also single unfair situations, such as political practices and judicial rulings.[50] In addition, many young people often regard their obsession with tattoos and piercings as a way to escape from the pressure of the fashion industry and to declare their exasperation with it, as the mass media constantly bombard them with beauty standards. Thus, one of the ways to escape this forced identification is to 'take real action - to mark the body in a way that cannot be changed.'[51]

Curiosity for extreme experiences and attracting attention

For some, body alteration is a way to impress, either positively or negatively, since, as they see, 'even negative attention is attention and may make the body modification worth the price.'[52] Also, these people often attempt to increase their levels of excitement through external stimulation with risky behaviours, which require courage and are characterised by some degree of spontaneity. Relative surveys have shown that most people who bear tattoos and piercings are far more likely to feel an intense inner desire for upheaval and new experiences, while they are not intimidated by stressful and dangerous situations.[53] Hence, possible motivations for body

[49] Kasten, pp. 233-234.
[50] Kasten, pp. 238-240.
[51] R. Salecl, 'Cut in the Body: from Clitoridectomy to Body Art', in *Thinking Through the Skin*, ed. by S. Ahmed and J. Stacey (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 21-35 (p. 31).
[52] Janice Selekman, 'New Era of Body Decoration: What Are Kids Doing to Their Bodies?', *Pediatric Nursing*, 29.1 (2003), 78.
[53] Kasten, pp. 236-238.

modification are the desire to impress and the search for new experiences, which are often associated with risk-taking or high levels of pain.

In this regard, many see painful physical modifications as a way to 'test' their pain tolerance and go beyond their personal limits, since decorative modifications, such as tattooing, piercing, and scarification 'are the signs of a palpable refusal to be bound by the previously prescribed limits of the body.'[54] As for pain specifically, for some, the main motivation for engaging in body modification is the desire to control their limits of pain, to find out how their bodies behave in extreme situations, and to, eventually, become better acquainted with themselves in general. Being resilient to pain and suffering, especially in a society that denounces pain and eliminates it with anaesthetic and narcotic substances, can create an image of strong symbolism.[55]

Even more, the Neo-Primitivists, apart from the modification practices mentioned, gradually began to engage in others, much more extreme and painful, such as voluntary electrocution, hanging from a hook embedded in the skin, isolation in small boxes, and more, including extremely painful and risky tattooing and body piercing, aiming to discover the limits and endurance of their bodies. They named this set of practices 'body play', yet it is a fact that one does not need to engage in all of these to belong to this social group.[56] However, while these practices are intriguing, this study primarily focuses on conventional cosmetic forms of tattooing and piercing. Finally, interestingly enough, for some researchers, tattooing and piercing could reflect 'the failure of contemporary institutions – most notably the church – to provide experiences that are deeply meaningful and so deeply marking.'[57]

Marking of specific experiences or emotions

As will be examined in more detail later, in some ancient societies, one's transition from one particular period of life to another was extremely important, which made it imperative to mark this transition on the body. For both women and

[54] Amanda Fernbach, *Fantasies of Fetishism: From Decadence to the Post-human* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 15.
[55] Kasten, p. 242.
[56] Christian Kleese, 'Modern Primitivism: Non-Mainstream Body Modification and Racialized Representation', in *Body Modification*, ed. by Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), pp. 15-38 (pp. 15-16).
[57] Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 64.

men, several life moments were 'recorded' in detail with the help of skin marking, as the commencement of menstruation, marriage, victory in a battle, adulthood, and many other events were transitional stages, which were indelibly carved on their bodies with painful procedures. Similarly, nowadays, modification practices are often applied in special circumstances, such as one's birthday, a life-changing event, or during an influential experience, such as military service. The significance of these situations is deeply personal and reflects on interpersonal relationships or specific incidents that some people need to physically imprint.[58]

Even more, some individuals, especially adolescents, undergo physical alterations because of their love for a person, believing that by getting to the point of modifying their bodies for someone else's sake, they are demonstrating their love and deepening their relationship with them. Particularly tattoos are very often carried out for this very reason, as they imprint on the flesh a strong romantic, family, or friendly bond between two or more people. Moreover, others implement body modification in order to manifest an erotic disappointment after separation, in an attempt to "immortalise" the special moments they experienced as well as to show how much the other person meant to them.[59]

Body modifications as a form of art (Body art)

In modern societies, skin cutting and marking are widely considered forms of art, as 'the streets have become a mobile gallery offering glimpses of elaborate monochrome patterns, intricate faux jewelry, fantasy creatures, and images appropriated from Van Gogh, Botticelli, and Picasso.'[60] For the advocates of the practices, the body is a canvas on which art can be manifested. Through this art, one can express oneself, as non-verbal communication by way of imitation, gestures, and movements is among the original and primary forms of comprehension and connection. Nevertheless, there is no unanimity as to whether body modification really constitutes art or not. 'They use their own flesh as so much material at hand for what? We hardly know how to characterize it. Art? Inscription? Sign language?'[61] In any case, although self-injury has ceased being a taboo in art, it is true that nowadays

[58] Iryna Pentina and Nancy Spears, 'Reasons Behind Body Art Adoption: What Motivates Young Adults to Acquire Tattoos?', *Journal of Customer Behaviour,* 10.1 (2011), 88.
[59] Kasten, p. 244.
[60] Victoria Lautman, *The New Tattoo* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), p.7.
[61] Alphonso Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 22.

no one could state with certainty whether there are limits to body art as well as what is considered permissible and what is not.[62]

Body ownership and body control

As Susan Benson posits, what is distinctive between contemporary and ancient body modification is the modern connection between the concept of permanence and ideas of the body as property and possession, '"a statement of ownership" over the flesh… as the only possession of the self in a world characterized by accelerating commodification and unpredictability.'[63] Modern body modifiers, therefore, view these practices as a way to control their own corporeality, as, for them, every person has complete dominance and the absolute authority of his or her own body, an authority that no one and nothing can deprive.[64] Hence, bodily alterations are seen as 'an act of "self-invention" in which individuals take control of their own bodies and mold them in accordance with their own desires.'[65] This becomes even more intense at younger ages: 'Cutting the skin gives expression to the need to cut the ties and sever the connection with mother… and gives the cutter a powerful sense of ownership of her own body and her own blood.'[66] As will be discussed later, this idea that people have absolute ownership and dominion over their bodies, which gives them permission to do whatever they want with them, became more widespread in the West after the enormous influence of the Enlightenment.

Spiritual significance

Almost every form of body modification applied in antiquity was associated with religious rituals and was of great spiritual significance for the individual and the society in which he or she lived. In modern societies as well, for some people, body modification represents a ritual. The symbolism of choosing the design and the body part, the process of undergoing the practice, as well as the care during the healing

[62] Kasten, pp. 260-264.
[63] Susan Benson, 'Inscriptions of the Self: Reflections on Tattooing and Piercing in Contemporary Euro-America', in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. by Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 234-254 (p. 251).
[64] Will Johncock, 'Modifying the Modifier: Body Modification as Social Incarnation', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 42.3 (2012), 243.
[65] Negrin, p. 30.
[66] Fiona Gardner, *Self-harm: A Psychotherapeutic Approach* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 73.

process, all acquire mystical characteristics and contain ritual elements.[67] Amongst neo-primitives, there are several who experience bodily interventions in a ritualistic manner, imitating their ancestors, and achieving superior spirituality. Furthermore, for some of them, body modification, through the pain it causes, are a means of communication with the divine element, whilst, for others, the painful tattoos and piercings can lead to 'significant changes in the body modifier's understanding and experience of the (embodied) self.'[68] However, several scientists, mainly sociologists, and psychologists, are increasingly rejecting the spiritual significance of these practices, countering that this belief is nothing more than a myth, consciously perpetuated by commercial tattoo establishments. According to them, this trend has nothing to do with the spirituality of the ancient rituals, while an entire lucrative industry of body modifications and sales of body jewellery has been set up behind it.[69]

The so-called 'religious tattoo', i.e. the application of a tattoo for the confession of religious faith, constitutes the most common modification form with spiritual significance. As will be examined later, the first tattoos of this kind appeared in the region of Egypt and Syria, while they were later adopted as pagan customs in the Middle East. This is why, according to the Jewish Law, they were associated with idolatry and paganism, and therefore forbidden. However, the practice finds application to this day in the Western world, mainly by Christians and this is why, in the relevant literature, it is often referred to as 'Christian tattoo', through which, young Christians find that religious symbols, such as crosses, icons, biblical verses, and rosaries can be easily translated into tattoo art.[70] For its supporters and practitioners, Christian tattoo can be the expression of the Christian faith, the symbol of conflation with God, the proof of an important personal spiritual experience, the expression of some religion-related emotion, and even 'the means of conveying the Word of God to the modern world.'[71] The tradition of Christian tattoos goes back hundreds of years, as it is true that the practice has existed for various reasons since

[67] Pentina and Spears, 85.
[68] Marie A. Pagliarini, 'Spiritual Tattooing: Pain, Materialization, and Transformation', *Journal of Religion and Violence*, 3.2 (2015), 195.
[69] Kasten, pp. 253-256.
[70] Anna Nussbaum Keating, 'Marked for Christ: The Sacred Symbolism of Religious Tattoos', *America*, 209.14 (2013), 30.
[71] C. P. Jones, 'Stigma: Tattooing and Branding in Graeco-Roman Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 77.1 (1987), 155-156.

early Christianity, from the period of the Late Roman Empire.[72] In the words of Kristi Upson-Saia, 'from the fifth century on, we begin to see Christians voluntarily marking their bodies as an act of religious devotion,'[73] while, as the Church historian Susanna Elm wrote, it is likely that some early Church ascetics '*stigmatized* themselves as a representation of Christ's self-enslavement, which led ultimately to the cross.'[74]

However, the most typical example of tattooing related to Christianity is found in the Coptic community, the Oriental Orthodox community of Egypt. Copts traditionally carve a cross on a prominent spot, usually on their right wrist, thereby permanently and visibly declaring their religious identity in an environment in which the Islamic element is traditionally dominant.[75] In the closing words of her work on the integration of the Coptic community within Egyptian society, the Coptic studies scholar Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder concludes, 'Coptic children will never stop singing the words from a popular song "I am a Christian, a Christian... [Look at] the tattoo on my hand!" but this tattoo will hinder the Copts' full integration only as long as Egypt does not have a fully democratic system that guarantees freedom of expression and belief for all.'[76] It is true though that not much has been written about the origins and the rationale behind the Coptic tattoo in the relevant bibliography. The dominant theory, however, is that the practice is associated with the Arab conquest of Egypt, which imposed a 'mark of humiliation' that Copts converted 'into the mark of collective identity, and a sign of resistance to the dominant culture.'[77]

It is a fact that the first Western Christian pilgrims who began to travel from Europe to the Holy Land viewed the Copt tattoo with suspicion and even considered it

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[72] For the practice by the Christians of the time, see Mark Gustafson, 'The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond', in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. by Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 17-31.

[73] Kristi Upson-Saia, 'Resurrecting Deformity: Augustine on Wounded and Scarred Bodies in the Heavenly Realm', in *Disability in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred Texts, Historical Traditions, and Social Analysis*, ed. by Darla Schumm and Michael J. Stoltzfuspp (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 93-122 (p. 111).

[74] Susanna Elm, '"Pierced by Bronze Needles": Anti-Montanist Charges of Ritual Stigmatization in Their Fourth-Century Context', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 4.4 (1996), 435.

[75] Terry Wilfong, 'Reading the Disjointed Body in Coptic-From Physical Modification to Textual Fragmentation', in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings-Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. by Dominic Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 116-136 (p. 119).

[76] Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder, 'Copts: Fully for Egyptian, but for a Tattoo?' in *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, ed. by Maya Shatzmiller (Montreal; Ithaca, New York: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), pp. 22-57 (p. 54).

[77] Nebojsa Tumara, '"Sign of Martyrdom, Heresy and Pride": The Christian Coptic Tattoo and the Construction of Coptic Identity', in Copts in *Modernity: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Melbourne, 13-16 July 2018*, ed. by Elizabeth Agaiby, Mark N. Swanson, and Nelly van Doorn-Harder (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 295-320 (p. 303).

heretical, due to the Christian belief that the God-given human body, created in the image of God, must remain unaltered.[78] However, later Christian visitors were influenced by these stigmas and began participating in the practice, giving birth to the so-called 'Jerusalem tattoo' of Western pilgrims to the area.[79] Another known form of Western tattoo related to the Christian faith is that associated with the 11th and 12th-century crusades, with which crusaders were embodying their arrival in the Holy Land, and, more recently, the sacred heart tattoo, which has been popular in the West for decades.[80]

Moreover, as will be analysed below, within the Christian tradition, there is an abundance of instances of deliberately hurting the flesh for the sake of the spirit, especially in Western Christendom. Many honourable Christian men and women, later canonised and venerated as saints by the Church,[81] engaged in painful bodily practices, such as mutilations, piercing of the flesh, and extreme fasting, in an effort to reach spiritual fulfilment, whilst, for many Christians, even today, the main incentive for deliberate bodily suffering is the imitation of the earthly suffering of Christ Himself. Thus, given that some modifications, such as tattooing and piercings, are particularly painful procedures, one could discern a relation between these paradigms and religious body modifications.

Self-healing

To the question of why people deliberately harm themselves through body modification, Favazza answers that it provides temporary relief from painful psychological symptoms and links them to 'the very profound human experiences of salvation, healing and orderliness.'[82] For some supporters of body modification, therefore, an important incentive for its employment is the treatment of various psychological or sociological problems, such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, shame, fear, and depression. According to them, after implementing the practice and

[78] Tumara, 304.
[79] For more, see Robert Ousterhout, 'Permanent Ephemera: The "Honourable Stigmatization" of Jerusalem Pilgrims', in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in honour of Bianca Kühnel*, ed. by Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 94–109.
[80] See Karmen MacKendrick, *Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), pp. 115-136.
[81] Elizabeth Baxter, 'Cutting Edge: Witnessing Rites of Passage in a Therapeutic Community', in *Controversies in Body Theology*, ed. by Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (London: SCM Press, 2008), pp. 48-69 (p. 49).
[82] Favazza, p. 34.

proving, first to themselves and then to others, that they can endure the physical pain inflicted, they are therapeutically relieved of the negative symptoms. In addition, they rediscover their lost self-esteem, gaining the impression that their personality was significantly improved.[83]

Besides psychological and sociological healing, it is a fact that skin marking and other painful body modifications have been used for bodily therapeutic purposes for thousands of years,[84] as evidenced by the case of 'Otzi the Iceman', which will be mentioned subsequently. Furthermore, as it will be also analysed, some forms of tattooing are medically used with beneficial results by modern science.

Mental disorders

In the relevant literature, it is frequently mentioned that modifying the body may often harbour psychological and psychiatric complications, while several practices are often associated with personality disorder issues or marginal behaviours. It is a fact that the majority of mental health professionals today agree upon the designation of certain body modifications as pathological and associate them with body-related disorders, such as anorexia, bulimia, and delicate self-harm syndrome. However, although body modification is often seen as self-injurious, that doesn't necessarily imply, in the view of Pitts, 'that every person who goes in for a piercing is mentally ill.'[85] Additionally, research has shown that tattooing and piercing specifically are associated with deviant and risky behaviours, such as drug use, violence, abuse, various illegal activities, and suicidal tendencies, especially among adolescents.[86] Finally, a close correlation between skin marking and various personality disorders exists, whilst other psychiatric illnesses that have been associated with an increased rate of bodily interventions are mania and bipolar disorder.[87]

[83] Kasten, pp. 271-275.
[84] For more on curative tattooing in antiquity, see Lars Krutak, 'The Power to Cure: A Brief History of Therapeutic Tattooing', in *Tattoos and Body Modifications in Antiquity: Proceedings of the Sessions at the EAA Annual Meetings in The Hague and Oslo, 2010/11*, ed. by Philippe Della Casa and Constanze Witt (Zurich, Chronos Verlag, 2013), pp. 27-34.
[85] Pitts, p. 243.
[86] See Sean T. Carroll, Robert H. Riffenburgh, Timothy A. Roberts, and Elizabeth B. Myhre, 'Tattoos and Body Piercings as Indicators of Adolescent Risk-Taking Behaviors', *Pediatrics*, 109.6 (2002), 1021-1027.
[87] R.F. Raspa and J. Cusack, 'Psychiatric Implications of Tattoos', *American Family Physician*, 41.5 (1990), 1483−1484.

No particular reason

As Benson saw, due to the fact that today bodily modifications constitute statements of the self, 'no longer is tattooing accounted for as drunken impulse or forcible subjection: tattoos, like piercings, are to be "chosen" after much deliberation.'[88] Still, however, body modifications are sometimes obtained without any prior planning and due to a spontaneous desire that can be activated simply by watching an advertisement of a tattoo studio or by a will to merely do something new and unusual.[89] Thus, some justify their decision to acquire a form of body modification as an impulse of the moment and not as a result of a lengthy decision-making process. For these people, therefore, not a particular reason led to this decision, while, not uncommonly, reports have shown it is often made under the influence of alcohol or drugs.[90]

Concluding this section on motivation, the reasoning why people choose not to apply any form of body modification is also worth mentioning, although the issue has not been adequately analysed in the relevant literature. The main reason behind this decision is the belief that body modifications not only do not increase attractiveness but rather reduce it, while, for some, the element of permanence is crucial. Secondary causes of the rejection of body modification are concerns for potential health complications and the fear of social or family disapproval. Finally, a relevant study showed that, as regards the female population, additional inhibitory factors are the pain and the cost of the practices, whilst, for men, the objections often derive from their religious background and beliefs.[91]

In the next two sections, the particular study cases of tattooing and body piercing will be separately examined.

1.2. The Case of Tattooing

The tattoo is an indelible mark or image on the body, which is created by adding ink under the surface of the skin.[92] The Hebrew word *seh-ret* (שרט) and the Greek

[88] Benson, 244.
[89] Pentina and Spears, 89.
[90] Wohlrab, Stahl, and Kappeler, 91.
[91] Lynda Dickson, Richard L. Dukes, Hilary Smith, and Noel Strapko, 'To Ink or not to Ink: The Meaning of Tattoos among College Students', *College Student Journal*, 49.1 (2015), 109.
[92] Teresa M. Winge, 'Tattoos', in *Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion, Vol. 3*, ed. by Valerie Steele (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 2005), pp. 268-271, (p. 268).

word *stigma* (*στίγμα*) have been used in the Old and the New Testaments respectively on the rare occasions the holy authors referred to the practice of marking the body.

Tattooing was practised in almost every known culture of antiquity and was considered an integral part of cultural identity. However, relatively recently, the discovery of an archeological finding proved the existence of the practice since the Neolithic era, and probably from the beginning of humanity. In 1991, in Austria, the preserved, due to the ice of the Alps, body of a man, Otzi, who is estimated to have lived circa 5,200 BC, was uncovered. Otzi's body was covered by 61 tattoos, such as crosses and many parallel lines, and the areas where these designs were placed have led scientists to the striking conclusion that the tattoos were applied for therapeutic purposes, possibly due to arthritis issues.[93]

1.2.1. The Historical Background

In antiquity, tattooing began to be applied for three principal reasons. The first was the adornment of the body, a practice commonly found among various ancient cultures. The second was the manifestation of religiosity and religious faith (religious tattoo), mainly in areas, such as Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The third reason was punishment, which was applied to slaves, criminals, and war prisoners in more culturally developed civilizations, such as the Greco-Roman world.[94] Later, during the 4th century AD, in the Byzantine Empire, a law that forbade the application of punitive tattoo on the face was issued by the emperor Constantine the Great. The reason behind this prohibition was the emperor's belief that human faces represent the image of God, therefore, any alteration of it constitutes blasphemy.[95]

Interestingly, the Picts, an ancient people who inhabited what is now Scotland during the early Middle Ages, were noted for their practice of tattooing or body painting, as described by various Roman sources. The Latin term 'Picti' is often interpreted to mean 'painted' or 'tattooed', highlighting their distinctive cultural practice of adorning their bodies with permanent markings.[96] However, the practice,

[93] Anne E. Laumann, 'History and Epidemiology of Tattoos and Piercings-Legislation in the United States', in *Dermatologic Complications with Body Art: Tattoos, Piercings and Permanent Make-Up*, ed. by Christa De Cuyper and Maria Luisa Perez-Cotapos (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 1-13 (p. 1).
[94] Jones, 141. A modern version of penal tattoo on prisoners is that in Auschwitz for the identification of the inmates of the concentration camp. See Dora Apel, 'The Tattooed Jew', in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. by Barbie Zelizer (London: The Athlone Press, 2001), pp. 300-322.
[95] Gustafson, p. 21.
[96] Tim Clarkson, *The Picts: A History* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016), p. 31.

as we know it today, comes from the island nations of the Pacific Ocean, since tattooing spread to modern Europe from Polynesia. A vast amount of literature has been devoted to Polynesian tattoos. For instance, as Claude Levi-Strauss wrote, for Maoris, the indigenous population of New Zealand, the tattoo was – and still is – of critical importance, as 'the purpose of Maori tattooings is not only to imprint a drawing on the flesh but also to stamp on the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group.'[97] Even more, in Samoa, traditional tattoos like the male-specific *Pe'a* and the female-specific *Malu* hold profound cultural significance. These tattoos play a vital role in cultural and national identity, symbolising spiritual experiences and rites of passage that mark maturity. Remarkably, Samoa, unlike many Polynesian cultures, has retained these traditional tattoos into modern times, preserving their sacred cultural heritage and honour, while, as DeMello points out, 'Samoan tattooists have helped other cultures to regain their ancient traditions as well.'[98]

During the Age of Enlightenment, the British navigator and explorer James Cook sailed to Polynesia, observed the phenomenon, was impressed by the unprecedented, elaborate, and intricate designs, and made it known to modern Europe. Consequently, and despite the fact that the Catholic Church, although never decisively condemned, strongly discouraged the practice in the continent,[99] this aroused the interest of Europeans in tattooing, resulting in the revival of the practice and the birth of the 'modern tattoo' in the West.[100] Moreover, the first Christian missionaries who arrived in Polynesia also tried to dissuade the natives from the practice, as it was considered incompatible with Christian teaching. However, most of the time, despite the extreme punishments often imposed, tattooing continued to be practised, as the natives strongly resisted, preserving their ancient tradition.[101]

1.2.2. The Modern Period

From the Enlightenment onwards, tattooing is 'de-stigmatized' in the West and gradually gains ground, as it begins to be applied by people of all social classes.

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[97] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, transl. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 257.
[98] DeMello, p. 234. For more, see Sébastien Galliot and Sean Mallon, *Tatau: A History of Samoan Tattooing* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2018).
[99] Juniper Ellis, *Tattooing the World: Pacific Designs in Print and Skin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 13.
[100] Ellis, p. 1.
[101] Ellis, pp. 23-25.

However, it is true that public opinion for the practice went through various fluctuations, as it has been the subject of serious controversy among modern cultural studies academics, art scholars, journalists, and other thinkers. Until the middle of the 20th century, tattooing was mainly associated with marginalised groups of people, such as convicts and gang members. This fact gradually turned it into a symbol of political discontent and revolution and, combined with the aforementioned emergence of Neo-Primitivism, contributed greatly to the further spread of tattooing and body modification in general. In the second half of the 20th century, many writers, journalists, and sociologists began speaking of a 'tattoo renaissance', characterised not only by an increase in the variety of designs but also by the upsurge of people's interest in the practice, including women.[102]

Due to this revival, the perception of tattooing has now changed, as do social norms. Nowadays, the body is largely regarded as a medium of communication and the tattoo as the message, but also the latter can be considered as the medium itself, a medium 'that carries messages of aesthetics, people, places, and a multitude of markers of personhood and culture.'[103] Globally, tattooing has become mainstream, it is widely considered 'morally neutral',[104] and is also regarded as a form of art.[105] As for modern professional tattoo artists, they no longer hold a prominent position in society or any particular prestige, as was the case in many ancient cultures, and their careers do not differ from those of other professions with artistic characteristics. Nevertheless, although the application of the technique requires artistic inclination and virtuosity, the fact that tattooing does not require the artistic creativity and independence found in other art forms, given its limitation to the needs and requirements of each client, has led many to question its artistic status.[106]

Moreover, the connection of tattooing with both personal identity and social conformity has been widely discussed. Tattoos, on the one hand, are considered part

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[102] Victoria Pitts, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 3-5.
[103] Chris William Martin, *The Social Semiotics of Tattoos: Skin and Self* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 33.
[104] As Matej Cibik sees it, the widespread perception that the decision to tattoo is considered to carry no moral implications is linked to normative ethics' neglect of the moral evaluation of the practice. Matej Cibik, 'On the Immorality of Tattoos', *The Journal of Ethics*, 24.2 (2020), 194.
[105] For more on considering tattoos as art, see Mary Kosut, 'The Artification of Tattoo: Transformations within a Cultural Field', *Cultural Sociology*, 8.2 (2014), 142-158.
[106] Sanders and Vail, p. 62. For more, see Nicolas Michaud, 'Are Tattoos Art?', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 29-37

of one's individuality and, on the other, a means of one's sociability, as 'many people acquire tattoos in an effort to distinguish their personal identity from that of others,' while others 'acquire tattoos as a way of sublimating their individuality, to further integrate their identity into a bounded social group.'[107] And this contradiction leads to the question of whether one's tattoo is actually one's free, autonomous choice or not. As Jonathan Heaps expresses, 'Why would someone do something so permanent and unusual? Would anyone do such a thing if they weren't somehow pressured or influenced by a trend or a fad? Aren't tattooed people just following the crowd? Are the tattoos everyone pretends to be symbols of rebellious freedom really the mark of a person enslaved to what's "cool"?'[108]

Modern techniques of tattoo application do not differ much from the ancient ones and the main difference lies in the means used, as today the employment of modern technology into the practice has been introduced. Nowadays, the penetration is done by a group of needles attached to a rod, which is located in a manual electrical device that resembles a pistol. The first such device was made in 1881 by Samuel O'Reilly and was inspired by the power tool invented by Thomas Edison, while the needles of the modern tattoo 'pistol' move extremely fast, reaching up to 3,000 hits per minute and penetrating the skin to about one millimetre in depth.[109] As for pain, tattooing is a quite painful process and the level of pain depends on several factors, such as the artist's skill and the client's pain tolerance. The main factor, however, is the part of the body where the tattoo is applied, as bony areas, such as hips and the chest, or more sensitive areas, like breasts and lower abdomen, are more sensitive to pain.[110]

Interestingly, besides cosmetic tattoos, there is a wide range of medical applications of the practice, as, due to its growing popularity, scientists have turned their attention to any beneficial services it can provide. The most common uses of this 'medical', or else 'paramedical' tattooing are two: a) its application after surgical procedures or plastic surgeries in order to cover or improve any postoperative defects

[107] Kyle Fruh and Emily Thomas, 'Tattoo You: Personal Identity in Ink', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 83-95 (p. 88).
[108] Jonathan Heaps, 'Bearing the Marks: How Tattoos Reveal Our Embodied Freedom', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 135-148 (p. 136).
[109] K. A. Mavridou and I. D. Basoukas, 'Τατουάζ: Από το Κοινωνικό Περιθώριο στη Γονιδιακή Ιατρική' ('The Tattoo: From Social Outcast to Genetic Medicine'), *Archives of Hellenic Medicine*, 28.5 (2001), 585.
[110] For more, see Cyril Siorat, 'The Art of Pain', *Fashion Theory*, 10.2006 (2015), 367-380.

and b) ‘dermatography’, a technique in which the colour of the skin is restored after skin lesions or skin burns. Even though one could argue that these two uses of the practice are also cosmetic, they both constitute medical tattooing, as they are associated with medical practices and aim towards ‘a variety of restorative solutions for conditions, such as baldness, vitiligo, and scars.’[111] A relevant study in 2021 reported high levels of satisfaction in all conditions for which medical tattooing was used, ranging from 78% to an impressive 100%.[112] In addition, medical tattoos have three more applications, the oncological tattoo, which is used to identify tumours, the endoscopic tattoo, for the diagnosis and treatment of intra-abdominal lesions, and the corneal tattoo of the eye, in the case of albumin, leukocoria, and iridectomy. Finally, the technique of intradermal inoculation usage of tattooing is still in the experimental stage.[113]

Apart from the application of tattoos, tattoo removal and its techniques have also raised much discussion. Especially in recent years, with the rapid increase in the practice’s popularity, the phenomenon of one wishing to undertake a removal is becoming more and more popular. The most common reason for this is that the person, growing up and maturing, realises that he or she regretted it, due to its application at a young age or after an impulsive decision of the moment,[114] while other causes are social stigma, unwanted skin complications, professional career, and domestic stress.[115] Until a few years ago, tattoo removal techniques used, such as surgery or cauterization, were neither safe nor effective, as they left visible marks on the skin after application, like wounds or colour marks. The advancement of technology has largely solved the problem, since laser, the modern removal technique used, can remove almost any type of tattoo. However, the word ‘almost’ is chosen due to the existence of certain types of dyes that even this technique cannot erase, while often the lack of familiarity with certain ingredients used in the tattooing process renders the success of the removal impossible.[116] Also, its high cost and the long-term treatment it requires are inhibitory factors for the application of the removal

[111] Stacie J. Becker and Jeffrey E. Cassisi, ‘Applications of Medical Tattooing: A Systematic Review of Patient Satisfaction Outcomes and Emerging Trends’, *Aesthetic Surgery Journal Open Forum*, 3.3 (2021), 2.
[112] Becker and Cassisi, 12.
[113] Mavridou and Basoukas, 590-591.
[114] It is estimated that ‘up to 50% of tattooed individuals regret their decision to get a tattoo at some point.’ Cibik, 203.
[115] Mavridou and Basoukas, 589.
[116] Armstrong and Kelly, 17.

technique. Nevertheless, research has shown that, due to the growing demand for removal, the cost of the practice is gradually decreasing, which, for some, makes it imperative for the health system to adequately inform about the issue and set up public tattoo removal services.[117]

Based on all these, one could say that, even though tattoos are still considered permanent, modern science and technology have managed, to a large extent, to eliminate the basic feature that diachronically characterises them, permanence. On the other hand, as Martin argues, 'as long as tattoo removal is rare, removal does not destroy the idea that permanence is one of the defining characteristics of tattoos.'[118] Ultimately, as the removal results are not yet satisfactory and no way has been found for the skin to entirely return to its 'pre-tattooed' state, permanence remains the most typical feature of the practice. In the words of Rachel Falkenstern, 'While the reasons people get tattoos vary from individual to individual and across cultures… their immutability is the unifying factor among the incredibly wide range of tattoo styles, practices, subject matter, and meanings.'[119]

1.2.3. Medical Complications

The ancient tattoo was applied with contaminated needles or other instruments, since there was obviously no prolepsis for their sterilisation, while it was performed on already infected skin, resulting in the appearance of many infectious diseases. In recent years, with the advancement of science and medicine as well as with the emergence of professional tattoo parlours, which are obliged to apply the rules of hygiene and public health, the incidence of these phenomena has significantly declined, albeit not completely eliminated, since the practice still has significant potential medical complications. The first to deal extensively with these complications and illnesses and to formally record them was the pathologist Felix Hutin in 1853, although today, through advanced modern Medicine, the list has been enriched with new ones.[120]

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[117] S. Varma and S.W. Lanigan, 'Reasons for Requesting Laser Removal of Unwanted Tattoos', *British Journal of Dermatology*, 140.3 (1999), 485.
[118] Martin, p. 35.
[119] Rachel C. Falkenstern, 'Illusions of Permanence: Tattoos and the Temporary Self', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 96-108 (p. 96).
[120] Jana Kazandjieva and Nikolai Tsankov, 'Tattoos: Dermatological Complications', *Clinics in Dermatology*, 25.4 (2007), 375.

Modern tattoos can cause a wide range of chronic complications that can even appear several years after the application of the practice.[121] The most common complications related to dyes and metal equipment used in tattooing are allergic and hypersensitivity reactions. Tattoo pigments contain several potentially allergenic ingredients, such as titanium, chromium, and manganese and, despite the efforts made to control the substances used, the unrestrained use of unapproved substances continues.[122] In the case of tattoo-related side effects, the skin damage that the equipment causes, combined with the inadequate sterilisation of the material used, can lead to a wide range of complications, some of which are particularly serious and dangerous even for human life.[123] The most frequent of these side effects are infections, as many cases of microbial and fungal infections have been reported.[124]

Most concerning, however, is the fact that several substances, such as black ink, which is very commonly used in tattooing, are classified as potentially carcinogenic. Much modern research includes tattooing as a documented risk factor for the development of skin cancer, while the entry of certain ink particles into the lymphatic system and bloodstream and their transport to lymph nodes links the practice to possible damage to vital parts of the body, such as the liver.[125] However, more research is needed on the link between tattoos and cancer or other serious long-term illnesses. In fact, as a 2020 study remarked, 'Toxicological evidence of health hazards due to tattoo inks has been arising for several years, but the first epidemiological work on the safety of tattoo inks and systemic diseases, including cancer, is only starting now.'[126] Inadequate knowledge of these critical perspectives can only raise concern about the extreme popularity of the practice and discussion about the possibility of stricter legislative frameworks.

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[121] See S.A.S. Van der Bent, D. Rauwerdink, E.M.M. Oyen, K.I. Maijer, T. Rustemeyer, and A. Wolkerstorfer, 'Complications of Tattoos and Permanent Makeup: Overview and Analysis of 308 Cases', *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*, 20.11 (2021), 3630-3641.

[122] Werner Aberer, Johan E. Snauwaert, and Ulf-Maria Render, 'Allergic Reaction to Pigments and Metals', in *Dermatologic Complications with Body Art: Tattoos, Piercings and Permanent Make-Up*, ed. by Christa De Cuyper and Maria Luisa Perez-Cotapos (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 61-90 (pp. 66-68).

[123] Mavridou and Basoukas, 587-588.

[124] Gayle E. Long and Leland S. Rickman, 'Infectious Complications of Tattoos', *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 18.4 (1984), 616-617.

[125] See Mitra Sepehria, Tobias Sejersen, Klaus Qvortrup, Catharina M. Lerche, and Jørgen Seru, 'Tattoo Pigments Are Observed in the Kupffer Cells of the Liver Indicating Blood-Borne Distribution of Tattoo Ink', *Dermatology*, 233.1 (2017), 86-93.

[126] Milena Foerstera, Ines Schreiverb, Andreas Luchb, and Joachim Schüz, 'Tattoo Inks and Cancer', *Cancer Epidemiology*, 65.1 (2000), 1.

Finally, in addition to its potential negative effects on physical health, some studies have linked tattooing to psychological harm and sociological complications, such as social stigma and discrimination.[127]

1.3. The Case of Body Piercing

Body piercing is the cosmetic puncturing of body parts for the purpose of long-term penetration of objects, such as rings, nails, or pins, and the most common body parts to which it is applied are ears, eyebrows, glabellas, nasal septum, nostrils, lips, tongue, cheeks, nipples, navel, male and female genitals, and various parts of the skin.[128] Hence, it is often said that 'there is no external organ of the human body that has avoided piercing.'[129] Like tattoos, body piercings have been practised in almost every society since ancient times. However, although surviving statues, paintings, ornaments, and other remains, from various ancient civilizations, testify to its vivid intertemporal presence, much less has been written about body piercing compared to tattooing.[130] Let us see, however, the practice's historical background in more depth.

1.3.1. The Historical Background

Although not much has been written about piercing, many found objects testify to the practice's application since ancient times, while, historically, there is much more surviving evidence of piercing than that of tattooing, as ornaments are usually preserved longer than the human body.[131] In fact, on the aforementioned mummified body of Otzi, along with his tattoos, an ear piercing with a diameter of 7-11 mm was also discovered, which proves that the practice is at least as old as tattooing. As for the oldest discovered earrings, they date back to 2,500 BC and belong to the Sumerian culture.[132]

In ancient times, besides beautification, which, as in the case of tattoos, was the most common reason, the motivations for getting pierced were many. The most

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[127] For example, see Annette Resenhoeft, Julie Villa, and David Wiseman, 'Tattoos Can Harm Perceptions: A Study and Suggestions', *Journal of American College Health*, 56.1 (2010), 593-596 and Benjamin A. Martin and Chris S. Dula, 'More than skin deep: Perceptions of, and Stigma Against, Tattoos', *College Student Journal*, 44.1 (2010), 200–206

[128] Michael Waugh, 'Body Piercing: Where and How', *Clinics in Dermatology*, 25.4 (2007), 408.

[129] D. Rabinerson and E. Horowitz, 'Genital piercing', *Harefuah*, 144.10 (2005), 736

[130] Laumann, 6.

[131] Enid Schildkrout, 'Inscribing the Body', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33.1 (2004), 323.

[132] Rayner W. Hesse Jr., *Jewelrymaking through History: An Encyclopedia* (Fairfield, California: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), p. 78.

popular of them has been ritual initiation, as the ability to endure pain was closely linked to the transition from adolescence to adulthood, an occasion that is often honoured by body piercing.[133] In addition, earrings found on paintings, murals, and sculptures, throughout the centuries, very often associate the practice with wealth and nobility, while the famous ancient Indian book *KamaSutra* constitutes historical piercing evidence, as it portrays genital piercing, which, according to some traditions, increases sexual pleasure.[134]

Furthermore, in antiquity, as the geographical area changed, so did the reasons for the practice as well as the parts of the body on which piercing was applied. Ancient Greeks were wearing dangling earrings in the shape of sacred birds or demigods mainly for decorative purposes and Roman centurions used to pierce their nipples for practical reasons, that is, to ensure that their capes were always attached to their bodies. Piercing was also a way for them to declare their allegiance to the Emperor, while the female residents of the Roman Empire pierced their ears with gems for embellishment. The Maya also used to pierce their tongues for spiritual and religious purposes, while the pharaohs in ancient Egypt, ritualistically, pierced their navels. Finally, genital piercings were applied by peoples of the Indian and southern Pacific Oceans.[135]

1.3.2. The Modern Period

Even though, as mentioned, not as much has been written specifically about piercing as about tattooing, it is certain that 'Europeans in the Middle Ages fostered a cultural environment that denounced the use of body piercings.'[136] However, piercings were reintroduced in the West and began becoming popular again from the Renaissance onwards, when European travellers were returning from various areas, where the practice was prevalent, such as Polynesia and the Middle East. After another decline in popularity during the first half of the 20th century, interest in body

[133] Aglaja Stirn, 'Body Piercing: Medical Consequences and Psychological Motivations', *The Lancet*, 361.9364 (2003), 1206.
[134] Christa De Cuyper, María Luisa Pérez-Cotapos S., and Laura Cossio, 'Piercings: Techniques and Complications', in *Dermatologic Complications with Body Art: Tattoos, Piercings and Permanent Make-Up*, ed. by Christa De Cuyper and Maria Luisa Perez-Cotapos (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 43-52 (p. 43).
[135] Samantha M. Tweeten and Leland S. Rickman, 'Infectious Complications of Body Piercing', *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 26.3 (1998), 735.
[136] Marina Perper, Adam S. Aldahan, John P. Tsatalis, and Keyvan Nouri, 'Modifications of Body Surface: Piercings, Tattoos, and Scarification', *International Journal of Dermatology*, 56.3 (2017), 351.

piercing has been rekindled, as the practice saw a revival, following the same historical path as tattooing, with the rebirth of body modification through the emergence of the Neo-Primitivism movement.[137]

Body piercing is now universally accepted and has become the most popular body modification practice worldwide, especially among teenagers and young adults, far beyond tattooing. Research has shown that over 50% of the total population worldwide has at least one earring, with 78% being women and men making up the remaining 22%. Interestingly, almost all men have their piercing in a conspicuous location, whilst this only applies to 77% of women, since the rest of the percentage has been pierced in obscure body parts, such as the navel, nipples, and genitals.[138] Even more, studios specialising solely in piercing have been introduced and are gaining popularity, as the negative stereotypes that have marked them for several decades 'are gradually fading as we prepare for a more adorned future.'[139]

Over the centuries, a plethora of materials has been used in body piercing. Natural materials, such as wood, ivory, and bones have always been popular in religious and ritual tribal piercings. Also, a wide variety of metals, which are used today as well, such as copper, silver, gold, and iron but also precious stones, like pearls have been found in excavations. The most common materials used today for both drilling and embedding are stainless steel, titanium, niobium, gold, glass, and plastic.[140] Although in the past the conditions under which body piercing was executed were unsanitary, the practice now is performed by professional 'piercers', who respect the hygiene regulations, and in specialised stores, most of which, although not always, perform tattoos as well. Moreover, even though, for some, 'as in the tattooing procedure, pain is sometimes an important element of piercing,'[141] local anaesthesia is often used, while the practice is done with certain, completely sterile, needles or special pistols, and according to current hygiene regulations.

Unlike tattoos, the practice of body piercing has not been used for the purpose of treating the body, and the term 'medical piercing' has not yet emerged in the relevant

[137] Perper, Aldahan, Tsatalis, and Nouri, 351.
[138] Sue E. Durkin, 'Body Piercing and Healthcare Concerns', *Journal of Radiology Nursing*, 31.1 (2011), 22.
[139] Perper, Aldahan, Tsatalis, and Nouri, 351.
[140] Christa De Cuyper and Davy D' Hollander, 'Materials Used in Body Art', in *Dermatologic Complications with Body Art: Tattoos, Piercings and Permanent Make-Up*, ed. by Christa De Cuyper and Maria Luisa Perez-Cotapos (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 13-28 (pp. 13-14).
[141] Alessandra Lemma, *Under the Skin: A Psychoanalytic Study of Body Modification* (Hove; New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 158.

literature. However, as already discussed, one of the many reasons several people engage in all forms of body modification is to address psychological and sociological issues, while it has been suggested that body piercing, in particular, can indeed, in some cases, be considered therapeutic, as it can have beneficial effects, such as increasing self-esteem and overcoming personal traumatic experiences.[142] Body piercing, therefore, can be seen as a method for the sociological or psychological well-being of the individual to be improved.

Finally, it is a fact that piercings are considered less permanent than tattoos. After all, if one decides that he or she does not want their piercing anymore, they can remove the jewel from their body. However, even in this case, dermatologists maintain that the practice most often leaves a permanent mark on the body, the likelihood of which depends on various factors, such as the body part and the material used. Piercing, therefore, is still included in the permanent or semi-permanent or body modifications,[143] while as Aglaja Stirn writes, 'in regulatory legislation, definitions are kept wider and permanence is judged differently. For example, in legislation in the state of Virginia, USA, body piercing is defined as "the act of penetrating the skin to make a hole, mark or scar, generally permanent in nature".'[144] Thus, although piercing is not as permanent as tattooing, the element of permanence still plays an important role in the practice.

1.3.3. Medical Complications

Due to the popularity of the practice, modern piercing, as mentioned, is done with stricter hygiene standards and with fewer complications, as the equipment and jewellery used are properly sterilised and made of medically safe materials. Nevertheless, medical complications are still quite common, since studies have shown that, especially in 'intimate' body parts, 'the incidence of complications related to body piercings may be as high as 70%.'[145] The development or not of complications as well as the frequency with which they appear depend on various factors. Some of

[142] Stirn, 1213. Additionally, a recent study showed that particularly navel piercing has positive socio-psychological effects on some women. See Christine Coleman and Helge Gillmeister, 'Body Image and Self-Perception in Women with Navel Piercings', *PLoS ONE*, 17.9 (2022), 1-25.
[143] For example, see Lisiunia A. Romanienko, *Body Piercing and Identity Construction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[144] Stirn, 1205.
[145] Brigette Lee, Ramya Vangipuram, and Erik Petersen, 'Complications Associated with Intimate Body Piercings', *Dermatology Online Journal*, 24.7 (2018), 6.

these are the hygiene measures taken, the part of the body part to which the piercing is applied, and the treatment and care of the wound by the client after the procedure. Also, important factors that determine possible complications are the piercer's experience and skill as well as the materials used.[146]

During the piercing process, due to the puncture and the wound it creates, there may be bleeding, swelling, and inflammation, which might, depending on the area and the organism, last for a few hours to several days. Special pistols can very often destroy tissues, causing blunt trauma, therefore, their use is acceptable only for earlobe piercing. Especially, in the case of tongue perforation, due to the nature of the organ, there may be particularly extensive bleeding, hypovolemic shock, or even severe swelling, resulting in airway obstruction. All the above are the so-called 'short-term' complications, which can be treated relatively easily. 'Long-term' piercing complications, albeit rarer, can often be quite serious and their treatment may even require surgery. Some of these are atrophic or hypertrophic scars and keloid scars, while the phenomenon of complete tear and detachment of the ear lobe, a condition that requires restorative plastic surgery, appears frequently. Moreover, due to the materials used, their contact with the skin, and their penetration into it, the incidence of various allergies is a very common side effect.[147] Some further complications, which usually depend on the site of the piercing, are infectious, such as staphylococcus, streptococcus, nipple and nose granulomas, jewellery rejection or metastasis, superficial nerve entrapment, tooth injuries, perichondritis, and others. As for the most common site for piercing, the ear, it has a very high incidence, almost 35%, of infectious complications as well as a high incidence of noninfectious ones, such as dermatitis.[148] Finally, the use of improperly sterile equipment can transmit blood-borne diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis,[149] while navel piercing has been linked to the development of ovarian cancer.[150]

Besides physical complications associated with piercing, various psychological ones have been observed. Some studies link body piercing to mental effects, such as

[146] Martin Kaatz, Peter Elsner, and Andrea Bauer, 'Body-Modifying Concepts and Dermatologic Problems: Tattooing and Piercing', *Clinics in Dermatology*, 26.1 (2008), 38.
[147] Kaatz, Elsner, and Bauer, 47-50.
[148] Donna I. Meltzer, 'Complications of Body Piercing', *American Family Physician*, 72.10 (2005), 2030-2031.
[149] Durkin, 24.
[150] See Paul Sanghera and Ahmed El-Modir, 'Umbilical Piercing Leading to Presentation of Ovarian Cancer', *The Lancet Oncology*, 6.9 (2005), 730.

misery, embarrassment, low self-esteem, and frustration, problems that often lead the individual not only to remove their piercing but also to never repeat the practice. Additionally, these studies have shown that the use of piercing is often conflated with violent behaviors, risk-taking, drug use, and, less commonly, suicidal tendencies. However, although it is true that psychosocial complications have not yet been scientifically researched as extensively as physical ones,[151] one recent study showed that people with tattoos and piercings display higher self-esteem as well as fewer symptoms of sleep disorders and social impairment, concluding that the two practices 'should not be considered as indicators of psychopathology.'[152]

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the subject from a non-theological perspective. By exploring the historical and social evolution of body modification in general, as well as tattooing and body piercing more specifically, we have seen how these practices have developed and transformed over time. The examination of the reasons behind body modification practices highlighted the various motivations, while the discussion on medical complications underscored the importance of considering the health risks involved. This foundational knowledge is essential for the subsequent moral theological evaluation, where these insights will be critically examined to assess the ethical implications of the examined practices.

[151] Myrna L. Armstrong, Jerome R. Koch, Jana C. Saunders, Alden E. Roberts, and Donna C. Owen, 'The Hole Picture: Risks, Decision Making, Purpose, Regulations, and the Future of Body Piercing', *Clinics in Dermatology*, 25.4 (2007), 400-401.

[152] See Anna J. Pajor, Grażyna Broniarczyk-Dyła, and Julita Świtalska, 'Satisfaction with Life, Self-Esteem and Evaluation of Mental Health in People with Tattoos or Piercings', *Psychiatr Pol.*, 49.3 (2015) 559-573.

CHAPTER 2: SCRIPTURAL TEACHINGS ON THE BODY AND ITS MODIFICATION

For Eastern Orthodox theology, the Trinitarian God is the source of everything good in the human experience. God, therefore, through His Word, is the origin of moral theology. The sources of ethical reflection are found in every expression of the revelation of God in Christian life, hence in the Holy Scriptures, the Church tradition, the Fathers and Mothers of the Church, canon law, ascetic experience, and liturgical worship.[1] In addition, the Fathers of the Eastern Church held that the Bible does not stand on its own, but 'it was born and shaped within the community of faith.'[2] In their view, the Word of God, which, on one hand, is the God-inspired biblical text and, on the other, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, is absolutely central and essential to every aspect of Orthodox life, 'from its liturgical celebration to its mission within the world at large.'[3] Ultimately, the two main sources of moral theology are the Bible and the Orthodox tradition, for these two provide humans with the main material they need for the journey to their final redemption through God.[4]

On the other hand, the use of Scripture in Catholic moral theology has not always been taken for granted and this has been a complex issue that has raised much debate and controversy. As the noted Catholic moral theologian, Servais Pinckaers, argued, the emergence and enormous influence of nominalism, the proponents of which rarely quote biblical passages and when they do, confine them to strict law and obligations, diminished the bonds between Scripture and Catholic ethics.[5] Indeed, since the Council of Trent, the manual tradition, which neglected the Bible or restricted it to rare citations became the main source of moral theology for the Catholic Church.[6] However, the decisive turning point was the Second Vatican Council. Following decades of theological research, Vatican II attempted and realised a renewal of the relationship between the Bible and Catholic ethics, declaring that special care should

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[1] Stanley, S. Harakas, 'Orthodox Liturgy and Ethics: A Case Study', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 15.1 (2002), 11-13.
[2] John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and Its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 3.
[3] Breck, pp. 13-14.
[4] Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική Ηθική Ι: Εισαγωγή, Γενικές Αρχές, Σύγχρονη Προβληματική* (*Christian Ethics I: Introduction, Basic Principles, Contemporary Concerns*) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2008), pp. 78-79.
[5] Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, transl. by Mary Thomas Noble (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), p. 253.
[6] Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, transl. by Alasdair MacIntyre (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2003), pp. 37-41.

be given to the perfection of moral theology, since 'its scientific presentation should be more based on the teaching of scripture,'[7] as well as naming the study of the Scripture 'the very soul of theology.'[8] Almost thirty years later, basing himself on Vatican II, John Paul II insisted that the Bible is 'the living and fruitful source of the Church's moral doctrine' and that the Gospel is 'the source of all saving truth and moral teaching.'[9] More recently, in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI reestablished the Bible's place in the Catholic tradition,[10] while, in 2013, Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, reaffirmed the importance of the study of the Bible not only for ethics but for Catholic theology in general.[11]

As for the topic of the present work, Scripture does not provide any explicit commandment that declares, for instance, 'Modify and embellish your flesh' or, contrarily, 'Thou shall not change or beautify your bodies.' Neither does it contain any explicit teaching for or against tattooing and body piercing. Nonetheless, there are several scriptural passages pertinent to the value and dignity of the body, the proper attitude of humans towards it, as well as its beautification and modification, which can provide valuable insights for contemporary discussions on the examined issues. Before, therefore, exploring the distinct theological perspectives of both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, this chapter focuses on these relevant biblical passages. While, alongside introducing these themes, the chapter offers a preliminary exegesis, their focal theological analyses by both the Orthodox and the Catholic tradition will unfold in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

2.1. The Value of the Body in the Bible

In the Bible, one can find remarkable teachings on the human body, its connection to the soul, and the relationship of people to it. Although the majority of these teachings are found in the New Testament, the great value of the human body and undeniable human dignity already originate from 'the beginning', as Christ Himself later called it (Mt 19:4, Mt 19:8), from the first two chapters of Genesis and the

[7] Second Vatican Council, *Optatam Totius*, 16 (28/10/1965); Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. II* (London: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), p. 956.
[8] Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 24 (18/11/1965); Tanner, p. 980.
[9] Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 28 (06/08/1993). The English translations of all papal encyclicals and other papal documents, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the official website of The Holy See (https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html).
[10] See Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (30/09/2010).
[11] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 170-175 (24/11/2013).

creation of humanity. The facts that God made humankind in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27), that He regarded this creation not only as 'good' but as 'very good' (Gen 1:31), and that He Himself 'formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (Gen 2:7) constitute unarguable evidence of this. Even more, the fact that God created the body first reveals its value and contradicts all the religious and philosophical dualistic schools of thought, such as Platonism, Origenism, Neoplatonism, and Gnosticism, which envisage the body as secondary and inferior to the soul.[12] Nonetheless, there is a substantial difference between body and soul, as the latter is directly created and God-breathed, whereas the former derives from matter, since it comes from the dust of the ground. In other words, the soul was not created through matter, but straight from the animating energy of God and this has been one of the facts that led many to deny the importance of the body and devalue it. However, as will be analysed subsequently, for Christian theology, this life-giving energy of the soul animates the body as well, as the human being is not a combination of two separate elements, body and soul, but a single, indivisible, psychosomatic unity.

An additional interesting element of the body that emerges from Creation is its spousal dimension: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh…and they become one flesh' (Gen 2:23-24). John Paul II, who thoroughly engaged with the spousal meaning of the body, interpreting these passages, elaborated that first, becoming one flesh does not refer exclusively to physical connection, as with animals, and second, that the image of God is not only an individual matter but also entails the community of persons: 'Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion.'[13] In addition, flesh and bones here, like in other passages as well (e.g., Gen 29:14, Judg 9:2, 2 Sam 5:1, 19:12-13), on the one hand, signify the relationship between humans and their unity, while, on the other, express the difference between humans and God, distinguishing them from Him, as He has neither flesh nor bones.[14]

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[12] Jean-Claude Larchet, *Theology of the Body*, transl. by Michael Donley (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), p. 13.
[13] Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, transl. by Michael Waldstein (Boston, Massachusetts: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), p. 163 (General Audience 9, 14/11/1979).
[14] Thomas Staubli and Silvia Schroer, *Body Symbolism in the Bible*, transl. by Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), p. 211.

However, in Genesis, there are two different states of the human body, its glorified state before the introduction of sin, in which Adam and Eve were 'perfect in beauty' (Ez 28:12), and its degraded one after the Fall that had corrupted their way upon the Earth (Gen 6:12). Before the Fall, in the beginning, the body was in the condition that God wanted it to be, imperishable and immutable, whereas, after the original sin, it becomes mortal and perishable. The introduction of physical suffering, pain, weariness, and death (Gen 3:16-19), which did not exist previously as physical traits, appeared as moral conditions, as punishments, as the results of the Fall. The divergence between these two bodily states is also highlighted by the fact that Adam and Eve, whilst before the Fall were not at all ashamed of their naked bodies (Gen 2:25), after the commission of the sin, became aware of their nakedness and tried to cover them (Gen 3:6).[15] Moreover, while before sin, God created them naked, as their bodies did not need any protection, after it, He clothed them with garments of animal skins (Gen 3:21) to protect them from the weather but also in order to symbolise their post-Fall condition, as, in Augustine's, for example, view, animal skins signify death and mortality because they derive from dead animals.[16]

These 'garments of skin', however, 'are not to be identified with the human body,' a notion that Church Fathers constantly repeated in order to counter ideologies that devalued it and to confirm 'the central Christian truth that the body and the soul together "constitute" the "natural" man.'[17] Indeed, despite the degradation of the body after sin, the Old Testament 'never singled out the flesh per se as the primary source from which corruption stems.'[18] Sin derives not from the flesh but from the inner self of human beings (Ps 81:12, Prov 6:25, Ez 33:31), which, due to the existence of the two in a psychosomatic unity, defiles the outer as well. Throughout the Old Testament, biblical humans are understood to be 'clothed' with skin and flesh and 'knitted together' with bones and sinews (Job 10:11), communicating with God firstly through their body, and all its organs, and secondarily through their soul, while

[15] Based on this, Augustine identified another effect of original sin on the body, lust, or else concupiscence. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 11.31-32; *Ancient Christian Writers, Vol. 42: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, transl. by John Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982), pp. 162-165.
[16] Augustine, *On the Resurrection of the Dead*, 11; *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century: Part 3 – Sermons, Vol. 10*, transl. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2003), p. 248.
[17] Panagiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, transl. by Norman Russell (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 46.
[18] Donn Welton, 'Biblical Bodies', in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. by Donn Welton (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 229-258 (p. 244).

several passages refer to physical organs, such as the heart, hands, eyes, ears, and mouth as well as to the fact that they are vital to understanding the Creator and communicating with Him.

Specifically for the heart, according to Ezekiel, God, replacing the impervious and stubborn 'heart of stone', placed 'an undivided heart of flesh' inside the body, so that people follow Him only and obey His commandments (Ez 11:19, 36:26). Nevertheless, this 'heart of flesh', does not obviously refer to the actual bodily organ, but indicates a spiritual organ devoted to God. Moreover, for Ezekiel, only after the body is fully formed and the bones are united with the flesh, can humans know God and believe in Him and can the soul enter the body and give life to it (Ez 37:1-14), while when the psalmist expresses his desire for God, he refers both to his soul and flesh, showing that his whole being is yearning for God and the life that only He can offer (Ps 63:1, 84:2).

Also, Leviticus, in particular, gives great importance to the body, expressing various rules regarding its integrity and cleanliness. These rules have to do with what passes through the orifices, especially the mouth (Lev 11) and genitals (Lev 12, 15), contaminating skin diseases (Lev 13, 14), sexual intercourse (Lev 18, 20:10-21), and congenital or acquired malformations. As for the latter specifically, God, speaking to Moses, forbade any priest with certain physical defects to serve at the sanctuary (Lev 21:16-23), as physical imperfection was considered an impediment to the exercise of priestly duties.[19] Ultimately, one can safely say that, even though Jewish thought distinguishes between body and soul, it does not abhor the former and considers both elements fundamental for the institution of humanity as God's only true image.[20]

What dominates the entire New Testament is, of course, the Incarnation of Jesus and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Incarnation has always been at the heart of the Christian faith and remains the focal point of Christian intentionality.[21] The fact that 'The Word became flesh and lived among us' (Jn 1:14), so that He redeems and sets humans free from sin, reaffirms the importance of the human body.

[19] Roland J. Faley, 'Leviticus', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 61-79 (p. 75). For more on this prohibition by God, see Julia Watts Belser, 'Priestly Aesthetics: Disability and Bodily Difference in Leviticus 21', *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 73.4 (2019), 355-366.

[20] Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus Books, 1979), p. 30.

[21] Anthony J. Kelly, '"The Body of Christ: Amen!": The Expanding Incarnation', *Theological Studies*, 71.1 (2010), 792.

The Word of God, although from a virgin mother (Mt 1:18-25), was born physically (Gal 4:4), and became a real, visible, living, thinking body, which other people heard, saw, and touched (1 Jn 1:1). As Apostle Paul advocated, in Christ, 'the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Col 2:9), as God sent His sinless son in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn the sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3-4).

Christ did not only assume human flesh and was not a human being that solely ate and drank but He also voluntarily acquired all the negative and unpleasant characteristics of the body, such as anger, sorrow, anguish, fear, exhaustion, pain, and death. As Ray S. Anderson put it, Christ 'reveals the true form of humanity not as one who in his innocence kept a distance from our humanity but as one who took on himself our own humanity.'[22] And precisely because He acquired all our humanity and He Himself suffered, He was able, when He was tempted, to save all those who were tempted (Heb 2:14-18). The incarnate Jesus, therefore, deliberately revealed the weaknesses of His own flesh, so that those who see Him realise that His body is not theoretical, but a proper human body, which is is also evident in His own words before His arrest, in the garden of Gethsemane, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Mt 26:41) as well as in Luke, who wrote, 'Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground' (Lk 22:43-44).

Throughout His life, Jesus maintained a sympathetic attitude towards the body, as, for Him, sin comes from the inside, that is, from the soul and not from the body:

> There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile… For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mk 7:15-23).

The decay and deterioration of the body are not due to itself but to the soul. The tainted soul is the one that makes people not only admire their neighbour's possessions, through their material eyes but also desire to acquire them. Moreover, Jesus cared for the wholeness of human nature, as even the hairs on the heads of

[22] Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991), p. 16.

righteous people are numbered (Mt 10:30), whilst He ensured His disciples that, although they will be persecuted because of Him, not a single hair of their head will be destroyed (Lk 21:17-18), words that reveal divine omniscience and providence. In addition, typical is the incident in which a woman was immensely praised for pouring perfume on His body: 'She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her' (Mk 14:8-9).

The positive stance of Jesus towards the body is also transparent in His famous phrase 'This is my body' (Mt 26:26, Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19) during the Last Supper and in His exhortation to eat His flesh and drink His blood, because, in His words, 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them' (Jn 6:53-56). Just as, in the Passover liturgy, the head of the house distributed bread to his family members, as a symbol of how he provided for them, now the head of the Church, Jesus, provides not only bread but His whole self, body and soul, for her.[23] Moreover, these passages are explicitly sacramental, since the need for participation in the Eucharist is nowhere more pronounced and eloquent,[24] while the doctrine of the Real Presence confirms the materiality of the Eucharist, as, according to it, Christ's body and blood are not symbolically, but literally present in the sacrament.

Alongside His teachings on the body, Jesus also took care of it in practice, miraculously healing not only the souls but also the ailing bodies of countless people. Indeed, the first experience of many people with Jesus was through a miracle and the Gospels present these events in a way that the whole body appears to be salvaged. Throughout the New Testament, cases of healing from several bodily diseases are depicted, such as fever, leprosy,[25] paralysis, withered body members, haemorrhage, hearing and speech damage, blindness, epilepsy, and even death.[26] Jesus also exhorted His disciples to carry on this mission after His death (Mt 10:8), while, even after His Ascension, His name and the faith in Him have the power to heal (Acts 3:16, 5:15-16,

[23] Robert J. Karris, 'The Gospel According to Luke', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 675-721 (p. 715).
[24] Dwight Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 156-157.
[25] However, the first biblical healing miracle from leprosy is found in the Old Testament: 'So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean' (2 Kgs 5:14). The healing of Naama is also mentioned in Luke: 'There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian' (Lk 4:27).
[26] Staubli and Schroer, p. 35.

8:7, 9:33-34; 40-41, 14:8-10, 19:11-12, 20:9-12). Hence, one could say that Christ cares for the totality of the human being in a way that He compares Himself with a physician of both souls and bodies, constituting the perfect ethical model for any healthcare professional.[27]

Nevertheless, Christ urged people not to care exclusively for their body and its needs, but to prioritise their soul instead: 'Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing... Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well' (Lk 12:22-31). In addition, for Jesus, only the Spirit is life-giving, whereas the flesh, which, however, should not be confused with the physical aspect of the human composite, is 'useless' (Jn 6:63), whilst teaching Nicodemus, He distinguished between the birth to flesh and the birth to spirit (Jn 3:5-6). The latter, which is baptism, leads to the new, heavenly, and eternal life that does not depend on the physical ascent but is a gift from God.[28] As will be examined subsequently, the distinction between spirit and flesh as well as the one between flesh and body played a crucial role in Pauline theology.

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus even commanded people to destroy their bodies for the sake of their salvation and to eliminate any body part that could prevent them from entering Heaven (Mk 9:43-47). However, as most exegetes agree, these passages do not suggest self-mutilation as a practice praised by God. Since it is not the flesh, but the human will that causes sin, what Christ here advocates is the removal, not of any part of the body, but of every sinful impulse and desire.[29] Additionally, according to some biblical scholars, these sayings are metaphorical and have a communal and political dimension as well because they suggest that some sinful Church members should be punitively excluded from her and the Christian community in general,[30]

[27] Anthony Fisher, *Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium* (Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 287-288.
[28] Francis Martin and William M. Wright IV, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 88.
[29] Mary Healy, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Mark* (Washington, D.C.: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 243.
[30] Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Gospel According to Mark', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 596-629 (p. 617); John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina, Vol. 2: The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002), p. 287.

while, interestingly, Moss suggested a literal interpretation that would justify an amputation performed medically, for the salvation of the whole body.[31]

Jesus most emphatically revealed the value, integrity, and eschatological purpose of the body immediately after the end of His earthly life, through His fleshly Resurrection. As Stephanie Paulsell, in a plain style, put it, 'The Resurrection of Jesus suggests that bodies matter to God. And they ought to matter to us, too.'[32] Although the biblical theme of bodily resurrection was debated within early Christianity, the predominant Apostolic Fathers St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna, as early as the first two centuries AD, zealously maintained that Christ rose from the dead in the flesh, a doctrine soon established in both the Western and Eastern traditions.[33] However, the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, where 'his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light' (Mt 17:2), was a preview of the celestial Jesus and constituted His first unveiling of the splendour of His body, as well as of its eventual Resurrection.

The bodily Resurrection of Jesus is biblically affirmed in the empty tomb tradition (Mt 28:1-7, Mk 16:1-8, Lk 24:1-6, Jn 20:1-8) and His appearances. Regarding the former, it constitutes proof that the material reality of the body of Christ has also participated in the Resurrection. As for His appearances, Jesus, after His suffering, presented Himself to His disciples, over the period of forty days, giving them 'many convincing proofs' that he was alive (Acts 1:3). In the narratives of Luke after the crucifixion, the risen Christ suddenly appeared to His disciples, who seemed not only reluctant but also terrified, believing that they encountered a spirit or ghost. 'Why are you frightened', He said to them, 'and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have' (Lk 24:38-39). Immediately after, He even eats in their presence (Lk 24:41-43), again proving the physicality of His resurrected body, while, just like God breathed His Spirit on Adam, John describes Jesus breathing the

[31] See Candida R. Moss, *Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 45-65.
[32] Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 8.
[33] See Donald W. Wuerl, *Fathers of the Church* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975), pp. 21-24.

Holy Spirit on His disciples (Jn 20:22), an act that, for Augustine, signified that the Holy Spirit proceeds not from the Father alone but from the Son as well.[34]

Additionally, as the well-known Johannine incident with Thomas shows, the risen body of Christ still even bore the wounds of His earthly suffering and death (Jn 20:24-29), the wounds by which the whole of humanity has been healed (1 Pet 2:24), 'as an ornament'[35] and 'as an everlasting trophy of His victory.'[36] In the view of Moss, these marks reveal not only the physicality of His resurrected body but also His divine identity, as, in her words,

> Jesus' wounds are an integral part of his identity. It is by his wounds that he is recognized as Jesus himself. It is only his infirmities that permit Thomas to identify him as his Lord and God. Once again, in the case of Jesus, the brokenness of his body forms a critical part of his identity. We might argue that, for this author, it is the holes in his hand and side that mark him as God.[37]

However, the fact that, in several instances, Jesus seems not to be immediately recognised (for example, by Magdalene in Jn 20:15[38] and His disciples in Lk 24:16[39]), raised questions about His resurrected body's resemblance to His earthly one. The Catholic priest and theologian, Hans Kung, for example, denied any continuity between Jesus' earthly and spiritual body, as, in his view, the latter totally replaces the former.[40] On the other hand, Benedict Ashley holds that the difficulty in recognition does not seem to imply a different and extraordinary physical appearance, but rather

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[34] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 121.4; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 92: Tractates on the Gospel of John, 112-24*, transl. by John W. Rettig (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), p. 60. This notion, several centuries later, led to *Filioque*, the main theological cause of the Great Schism. See A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[35] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, 6.3; *The Life in Christ*, transl. by Carmino J. deCatanzaro (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 163.

[36] Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 54, a. 4.

[37] Candida R. Moss, 'Heavenly Healing: Eschatological Cleansing and the Resurrection of the Dead in the Early Church', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79.4 (2011), 1002.

[38] 'Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away".'

[39] 'but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.'

[40] Bernard P. Prusak, 'Bodily Resurrection in Catholic Perspectives', *Theological Studies*, 61.1 (2000), 79.

that the witnesses 'could not believe their eyes,'[41] while Archbishop Averky suggests that perhaps it was because their eyes were full of tears.[42]

Leaving the Gospels aside, Apostle Paul is the most important biblical author with regards to the body, as his teaching became hugely influential, and his body theology constitutes the 'rootstock for much Patristic and subsequent theological elaboration.'[43] The Incarnation of Jesus and the whole question of the human body, in general, lie at the heart of the Pauline interpretation of the message of Christ. In the words of the Anglican bishop and biblical scholar, John Robinson, 'One could say without exaggeration that the concept of the body forms the keystone of Paul's theology. In its closely interconnected meanings, the word σώμα (soma) knits together all his great themes.'[44] Paul referred to the human body and flesh in various ways, always depending on the audience and the particular context of his teaching.[45] For him, the purpose of the whole body with all its organs is to behave in a godly manner. 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters,' he stresses to the Romans, 'on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship' (Rom 12:1). Sacrifice and worship to God, therefore, are actions that engage not only the soul but the whole person.[46]

In the same epistle, however, he preaches, 'I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' (Rom 7:22-24). In a like manner, he claims that whoever is under the domination of the flesh wants whatever the flesh wants, whereas those who are driven by the grace of the Holy Spirit will desire what God wills. The mind that is governed by the flesh is hostile to God, but the one that is guided by the spirit 'is life and peace' (Rom 8:5-8). That is why Paul urges Christians to clothe themselves with Christ, instead of caring about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (Rom 13:14). Similarly, to the Corinthians, he maintained that 'flesh and

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[41] Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (St. Louis, Missouri: Pope John Center, 1985), p. 591.
[42] Archbishop Averky (Taushev), *The Four Gospels: Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, Vol. 1* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Seminary Press, 2015), p. 499.
[43] Hannah Hunt, *Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era* (Farnham; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012), p. 32
[44] John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 9
[45] Ashley, p. 511.
[46] Scott W. Hahn, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), pp. 349-351.

blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (1 Cor 15:50), while he added, 'Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day' (2 Cor 4:16). To the Galatians, Paul again turned against the flesh in comparison to the spirit:

> Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:16-21).

This 'fight' between the spirit (*pneuma*) and the flesh (*sarx*), the inside and the outside, is paramount in Pauline theology. However, although all these notions are seemingly against the body, in reality, not the body, but the sinful, carnal soul with its desires is what Paul opposes, as the distinction between 'physical' and 'carnal' is fundamental for the understanding of Pauline theology. As the contemporary Eastern Orthodox theologian and bishop, Kallistos Ware, explains, in the thought of Paul, the terms 'spirit' and 'flesh' do not indicate human components, 'but relationships embracing personhood in its totality. "Flesh" is the *whole* person as fallen, "spirit" the *whole* person as redeemed.'[47] This is also confirmed by the fact that in Paul's aforementioned listing of the 'works of the flesh', several of them are not at all connected with the body. Paul, like Christ, holds that every sin – apart from sexual immorality – is 'outside the body' (1 Cor 6:18) and disassociates the human body from blind submission to carnal desires, which are contrary to the divine will and can be catastrophic. For the Apostle, the value and dignity of the body is precisely the reason why we must not live 'according to the flesh', but 'by the Spirit' (Rom 8:12-13).[48] The distinction between spirit and flesh and the rejection of the latter is used in

[47] Kallistos Ware, '"My Helper and My Enemy": The Body in Greek Christianity', in *Religion and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 90-110 (p. 93).

[48] It is true, however, that the misinterpretation of this distinction between *soma* and *sarx*, led some early Christians to deny bodily resurrection as well as loathe and even humiliate the body, 'in the name

other New Testament passages as well (e.g., 1 Pt 3:18, Jm 5:1-3, 1 Jn 2:15-17), while, besides this antithesis, there is another one, the antithesis between what comes from God and what comes from the world. 'Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly' (Col 3:5), as Paul exhorts, and, in the words of John, 'all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world' (1 Jn 2:16).[49]

In the third chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul expresses one of the most important Christian teachings on the value of the human body, namely that it is the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16) and a member of Christ (1 Cor 6:15), while he adds, 'do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body' (1 Cor 6:19-20). In these passages, Paul showcases the sanctity of the body, highlighting that it does not belong to humans but God, as it constitutes His temple and he also warns that whoever abases it will be accountable to God.[50] Humans, therefore, have nothing of their own, not even their body parts, which are 'bought' by Christ, which, however, does not nullify our freedom and self-determination; rather it unveils 'our connection and loving relationship with Christ.'[51] The divine Spirit inhabits our bodies, thus, we are asked to dedicate our whole lives to God and become 'victims' for Christ. When the defilement resulting from sin invades the temple of God, His Spirit abandons it, rendering the human body the prey of the passions that destroy it.[52] Furthermore, these passages constitute proof that both ancient Hebrews and early Christians were not dualistic, unlike the majority of the ancient philosophies that downgraded the body and divided the human being into physical and non-physical.[53]

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of Christianity.' Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I am my Body: A Theology of Embodiment* (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 41.

[49] This 'threefold concupiscence', as John Paul II calls it, is born not in the flesh, but the heart and 'penetrates into human actions as the concupiscence of the eyes, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the pride of life.' John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 329 (General Audience 50, 10/12/1980).

[50] Dimitrios P. Rizos, *Οσίου Πατρός ημών Νικόδημου του Αγιορείτου, Ερμηνεία εις τας ιδ' Επιστολάς του Αποστόλου Παύλου, Τόμος Πρώτος* (*Holy Father Nicodemos of Mount Athos, Interpretation in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, Vol. 1*) (Thessaloniki: Kypseli, 1989), p. 411.

[51] Rizos, *Vol. 1*, p. 455.

[52] Panagiotis N. Trempelas, *Υπόμνημα εις τας Επιστολάς της Κ. Διαθήκης, Τόμος 1* (*Memorandum in the New Testament Epistles, Vol. 1*) (Athens: O Sotir, 1989), p. 264.

[53] Elliott C. Maloney, *Saint Paul: Master of the Spiritual Life 'In Christ'* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014), pp. 338-342.

Nevertheless, Paul's paramount teaching in regards to the body and the one on which all his 'anti-carnal' theology is based is its eschatological resurrection:[54] 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you' (Rom 8:11). Christ, therefore, not only acquired human flesh, but He also deified it, as His Resurrection adumbrated a general resurrection of the flesh. Just as He rose from the grave not only spiritually, we shall eventually be resurrected both body and soul, and, in John's words, 'we will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1 Jn 3:2). The notion of bodily resurrection was very soon accepted by most Christian thinkers. In the 2nd century, the Christian apologist Tatian, for instance, opposing paganism, wrote, 'Even though fire (will) destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter… God the Sovereign, when He pleases, will restore the substance that is visible to Him alone to its pristine condition.'[55] For Paul, we are all filled with longing for the redemption of our soul as well as 'the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8:23). However, even though all the flesh will be resurrected, only that of the righteous will be glorified, as each one of us will be somatically and spiritually raised from the dead in order to 'receive due recompense for actions done in the body, whether good or evil' (2 Cor 5:10). Heaven's bliss and Hell's punishment, deification and condemnation, eternal life and eternal death will be experienced physically. Also, as some saw, even amongst the risen bodies of the elect and those of the damned, there will be a hierarchy, since both the punishments of Hell and the rewards of Heaven differ.[56]

In addition, just as the sinful 'carnal soul' exists, so does the sinless 'spiritual body', after death. As Paul asserted, 'So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:42-44). The Apostle calls this body a new, eternal house in Heaven, different

[54] Although the concept of the resurrection of the flesh was scripturally apparent already in the Old Testament (Job 19:25-27, Ps 16:8-10, Is 26:19; 35:5, Dan 12:2).
[55] Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*, 6; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 103.
[56] As Chrysostom, for example, saw, those who did not corrupt their earthly bodies at all, that is, virgins, ascetics, and martyrs will hold the highest rank in heaven and will have the most glorious resurrected bodies. Chris L. de Wet, 'John Chrysostom's Exegesis on the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15', *Neotestamentica*, 45.1 (2011), 108-109.

from the earthly tent of our soul, which we all want to be clothed with (2 Cor 5:1-4), affirming his positive stance towards the body, on the one hand, and the condemnation of the sinful flesh, on the other. In Daniel Boyarin's words, in these verses and in Pauline theology in general, there is a peculiar combination of a 'positive sensibility towards the body' combined with a Greek/Platonic devaluation of the flesh.[57]

However, Paul, apart from the fact that we will be raised imperishable and we will all be changed (1 Cor 15:51-52), which clearly suggests a degree of alteration, does not give more details about the shape and form that the risen body will have and this is why its exact status has been the subject of debate over the centuries, especially in the West.[58] For most Christian thinkers, despite the radical alteration of the body, there surely is continuity between the penultimate and the ultimate, as Paul's image of the seed shows (1 Cor 15:35-39).[59] In the state of bliss, the spiritual body is still a body and does not become a soul, a fact that manifests the flesh's capability of resurrection and existence in Heaven, whilst, in this state, what is destroyed is not the natural body, which remains unchanged, but the decay that comes from sin. Even though, therefore, Paul calls it spiritual and not material, the resurrected body will be corporeal, as its 'spirituality' does not refer to its detachment from the flesh, but to its liberation from any carnal desire and defect. As it is written in the Acts, about the death and resurrection of David, he 'was laid beside his ancestors, and experienced corruption, but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption' (Acts 13:36-37). Thus, the body of the righteous will carry the substance of the flesh but not the flesh's heaviness and corruption.[60]

Apostle Paul's anguished anticipation for this eschatological resurrection and the sacrifices that his body has been through for its sake and the sake of the Church (Col 1:24) are evident throughout his letters. As the aforementioned Gal 6:17 shows, Paul was a man 'whose body ached for the great change that might soon come upon it' and

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[57] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 61-62.

[58] For a comprehensive study of these discussions until the mid-14th, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

[59] 'But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen and to each kind of seed its own body.'

[60] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 13.22; *The City of God against the Pagans*, transl. by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 569.

lived his whole life between revelation and resurrection.[61] His body was in chains for the 'mystery of Christ' (Col 4:3), whilst, on his flesh, he gladly carried the 'thorn'[62] and all his pains and weaknesses, which prevented him from being proud (2 Cor 12:7), as, in the psalmist's words, those who do not suffer bodily have pride as their 'necklace' (Ps 73:4-6). In Paul's view, God's power 'is made perfect in weakness,' while when we are physically weak, this is when we are spiritually strong (2 Cor 12:9-10). Just as, in Revelation, all these who suffer earthly martyrdom for God will go to Heaven, where will be adorned with white robes (Rev 6:9-11, 7:14) as 'a symbol of the glorified bodies of the righteous dead,'[63] Paul attests that, since we all bear the death of Jesus in our bodies so that His life can be revealed in our mortal body (2 Cor 4:10-11), if we indeed share in His sufferings and imitate Him, we will share in His glory as well (Rom 8:17). This is why, as he says, 'I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified' (1 Cor 9:27), while, similarly, in the words of Peter, since Christ suffered bodily, 'arm yourselves also with the same intention, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin' (1 Pet 4:1).

Based on these biblical passages, several early Christian writers projected bodily suffering, pain, death, and martyrdom, in general, as the means to a noble Christian life and the way to attain God, since whether one wants to attain God, one can do so only 'through tribulation and suffering.'[64] Polycarp, for example, exhorted the Philippians to imitate honourable people, like Paul, who suffered with God, because they loved not this world, but Him,[65] whilst, for Ignatius, 'he who is near to the sword is near to God; he that is among the wild beasts is in company with God.'[66] Furthermore, in Ignatius's words, referring to his own martyrdom, 'Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful

[61] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 46.
[62] However, there has been disagreement among exegetes as to the nature of this thorn. See Candida R. Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies: Reconsideration of the Function of Paul's Thorn in the Flesh (2 Cor. 12:7–10)', *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, 16.4 (2012), 319-333.
[63] Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Apocalypse (Revelation)', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 996-1016 (p. 1005).
[64] Barnabas, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, 7; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, p. 220.
[65] Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 9; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, p. 61.
[66] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 4; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, p. 144.

torments of the devil come upon me: only that I attain Jesus Christ.'[67] It is a fact, therefore, that Christians who endure earthly pains and even sacrifice their own bodily life for God are highly appreciated and will be rewarded in the afterlife.

As Paul saw, although the flesh is so noble that it will be resurrected, physical sacrifices are required for the pursuit of spiritual redemption. Hence, one could say that there is a contradiction, since we should respect our bodies and take care of them but also destroy and enslave them. However, an in-depth examination of Pauline's passages shows that humans need to cultivate a balance between these two theoretically opposite positions, only through which can people satisfy their body's needs yet avert its idolization. Although the training of the soul is more important (1 Tim 4:8-9), the body is not evil, but rather 'the vehicle of commitment and the instrument of love' and it ought to 'be trained to be more responsive to the needs of others than of its own.'[68] This is why Paul advises us to control it in a holy and honourable way, as opposed to pagans who do not know God (1 Thess 4:4-5). Our resurrected bodies will be fashioned after Jesus' glorified body, who 'will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory' (Phil 3:21). Thus, Paul does not, by any means, desire the annihilation of the flesh, but its restoration to Christ and even its deification. Humans must love themselves and their bodies, still remaining humble and not letting that love reach egoism. True love can never be associated with selfishness (1 Cor 13:5), while 'gentleness', 'self-control', and the crucifixion of the flesh 'with its passions and desires' must always prevail (Gal 5:23-24). Finally, people ought to mimic Christ, remaining modest and avoiding selfish ambition, which leads to vanity (Phil 2:3-5). Only through humility, can we avoid egoism an d return to true love for ourselves and our bodies.

Similar to Jn 2:21,[69] one more Pauline notion on the human body is the fact that the Church, with all her members, is Christ's mystical body and He is her head (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18). Paul states that there is only one real body, in which people must unite and grow spiritually, the development of which depends on each member performing the tasks proper to it (Eph 4:4-16). Moreover, just as Christ loves and cares for His mystical body and all its members, so we should not ignore our body,

[67] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans*, 5; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, p. 125.
[68] Jerome Murphy-O' Connor, 'The First Letter to the Corinthians', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 798-815 (p. 807).
[69] 'But he was speaking of the temple of his body.'

but rather love it (Eph 5:29-30), while, as each member of our body has a different function, we, as members of the one body of Christ, have different charismas, 'according to the grace given to us' (Rom 12:4-6). The Apostle also associates the Holy Eucharist with our incorporation into the body of Christ, saying, 'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Cor 10: 16-17). Paul attends to remind Christians that they all constitute members of the body of Christ, the Church, which looks not to herself but to Him for her sustenance, as He is her creator and cares for her. Just as a body of flesh is not complete without a head nor the head is complete without a body, Jesus and the Church complement each other. Through the unity and community of all the members of the body, both the head is complete and the body becomes perfect.[70] This is why Paul referred to the totality of the body, exhorting humans to keep it holy and care for its wholeness, just as Jesus cares for His body, all humankind.

Concluding this presentation of scriptural references to the human body, I shall quote the whole passage unaltered, as the words of the Apostle are exceptional:

> Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker

[70] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians*, 3; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 13* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), pp. 117-123.

> are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:12-27).

From all of the above, the appreciation of the value and dignity of the human body in the Bible becomes clear, an appreciation that renders our correct and moral attitude towards it imperative. Despite the fact that the ancient thinkers also had spoken of the divine *Logos* (Word), only in Scripture it marvellously becomes flesh and lives amongst people. This differentiated Christianity from the prior Greek, Roman, and Jewish religious and philosophical thoughts and led to an intensification of body appreciation, which, as we shall see, took a more definite shape during the first centuries of the Church.[71]

2.2. Beauty and Beautification in the Bible

In the Old Testament, there are several positive beauty-related passages, and perhaps the most typical of them are the ones in the book of Song of Songs: 'Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful' (Song 1:15, 4:1).[72] The passages also exalt many parts of the human body, such as the eyes, lips, breasts, and neck, likening them to several beautiful objects, like jewels, fawns, birds, and scarlet ribbons. Also, in the Psalms, the supreme divine beauty is exalted, as God is described as clothed with majesty (Ps 93:1, 104:1) and having splendour and beauty before Him (Ps 96:6), while Isaiah refers to the eschatological beauty of Jerusalem (Is 52:1, 62:3) and God (Is 28:5, 33:17, 35:2).

Nevertheless, 'delight to the eyes' (Gen 3:6) is how Genesis describes the forbidden fruit when Adam and Eve were trying to apologise to God for eating it, as external beauty can often be deceiving and one's obsession with it may lead to

[71] Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 59.
[72] All scriptural translations follow the New Revised Standard Version (Published in 1989 by the National Council of Churches).

internal 'ugliness' and sin. Based on this, early Christians associated evil with alluring attractiveness, portraying the Devil as a handsome, charming, and seductive figure, and spoke of the goodness of internal beauty instead.[73] This distinction between internal and external beauty is blatantly manifested in Proverbs, in which, although the qualities of the perfect wife are extensively described, external attractiveness is not one of them. 'Strength and dignity are her clothing' (Prov 31:25), it is written, whilst 'Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' (Prov 31:30). That is why many Western and Eastern Church Fathers, as will be discussed below, maintained a sceptical or even hostile attitude towards bodily beauty.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many references to beautification practices and pieces of jewellery, since their usage was considerably common for the Israelite people. However, these practices were generally condemned, as most of them were considered idolatrous and incompatible with God's will, while often adornments were associated with adultery, which also became a metaphor for Israel's worship of foreign gods.[74] Especially harsh on these practices is prophet Isaiah's criticism:

> The Lord said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet… Instead of perfume there will be a stench; and instead of a sash, a rope; and instead of well-styled hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth; instead of beauty, shame (Is 3:16-24).

For God, therefore, external beauty is frivolous and insignificant, since, as is written in the first book of Samuel, 'the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Sam 16:7).

However, the most characteristic pertinent Old Testament passage is found in Ezekiel, who likens Jerusalem to a beautiful but immoral woman, again demonstrating the futility of external beauty:

> I clothed you… I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head... You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to

[73] John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, Pennsylvania: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 31.
[74] Alicia J. Batten, 'Clothing and Adornment', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 40.3 (2010), 150.

> be a queen. Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of my splendor that I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God. But you trusted in your beauty and prostituted yourself… You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and my silver that I had given you and made for yourself male images and with them prostituted yourself (Ez 16:10-17).

In the New Testament, there are some passages related to outward embellishment, most of which disapprove of it compared to the inward one, which is praised. Christ Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, exhorted people to have faith in God and not to worry about clothes and external embellishments, just like the lilies of the valley and the wildflowers, which grow only by the providence of God and are more beautiful than King Solomon, 'who was famous for his tremendous wealth,'[75] can ever be beautified (Mt 6:27-30, Lk 12:27-30). Likewise, Jesus severely attacked the Pharisees, due to the fact that they hypocritically cared only for their external appearance (Mt 23:25-28), contrasting external and internal purity, and emphasising the importance of the latter. Thus, humans must have faith in the providence of God, who can reveal beauty without us having to agonise over it.

Apostle Paul, following Jesus' teaching, preaches, 'I desire… that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God' (1 Tim 2:8-10). In Paul's view, women ought to be humble and embellished with prudence rather than with excessive physical means, while the adornment with good deeds that Paul suggests 'give the Christian woman a beauty that jewellery or cosmetics can never produce.'[76] In James' epistle, the advice not to judge based on physical appearance and clothing is given (Jas 2:1-5), whereas, although gold and silver ornaments seem stunning to earthly eyes, they are corroded and their corrosion will eventually consume the rich man's flesh 'like fire' (Jas 5:1-3). St. Peter's exhortation to women, in particular, reflects the biblical approach:

> Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner

[75] Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 111.
[76] George Montague, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: First and Second Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 65.

> self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by being subject to their husbands (1 Pet 3:3-5).

For Peter, instead of emphasising outward embellishment, people should be clothed with humility, as 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' (1 Pet 5:5). Finally, in Revelation, the 'prostitute' city of Babylon is portrayed as a woman dressed in purple and scarlet, adorned with 'with gold and jewels and pearls,' and having her name written on her forehead (Rev 17:3-5).

What is considered attractive to humans, therefore, is not necessarily attractive to God and vice versa. For Him, what is good and moral is beautiful, while what is corrupted could never be attractive, even if it is considered delightful and stunning to human eyes. As the early Church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote, through martyr Blandina's death, 'Christ made manifest, that the things that appear mean and deformed and contemptible among men, are esteemed of great glory with God, on account of love to him, which is really and powerfully displayed, and glories not in mere appearance.'[77]

2.3. Body Modification in the Bible

Regarding bodily alteration practices, several scriptural passages contain orders against any form of modification. Leviticus, for instance, stresses that members of the priesthood 'shall not make bald spots upon their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or make any gashes in their flesh' (Lev 21:5), as any cut on the body is prohibited to priests, for the practice is associated with Greek paganism.[78] Deuteronomy extended the ban to the lay populace as well, since God commanded people not to cut themselves or shave the front of their heads for the dead (Deut 14:1).[79] As the Roman Catholic priest and exegete Leslie Hoppe holds, this commandment is given in order for the uniqueness of God of Israel to be emphasised. He is not like the other gods, he explains, 'and so those who serve this God cannot pattern their behavior according to the customs associated with the service of foreign

[77] Eusebius of Caesaria, *Church History*, 5.1.17; *Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged*, transl. by C. F. Cruse (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), p. 150.
[78] Giannakopoulos, *Vol. 6*, p. 147.
[79] However, in the book of Job, it is written that Job, who was praised for the morality of his character, mourned by shaving his head (Job 1:20).

gods. Israel is to be holy, that is, unique, as its God is holy.'[80] In addition, in Deuteronomy again, emasculation is condemned: 'No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall come into the assembly of the Lord' (Deut 23:1). Although, as Clifford saw, this passage defends physical integrity,[81] according to Hayes, there is no certainty as to the reason for this prohibition, since it could be based on castration being: a) a non-Israelite cultic practice, b) an action that destroys the procreative power of Israel, or c) a self-mutilating practice 'contrary to the design of God's creation.'[82]

Despite these prohibitions, the truth is that eunuchism had a strong Jewish background amongst people of the time, who thereby wanted to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Self-castration became a real problem in early Christianity as well, the main reason for which is believed to have been the following words by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: 'For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can' (Mt 19:12). One could say, therefore, that there is a contradiction, as, albeit the practice is rejected in the Old Testament, Jesus seems to approve of deliberate self-eunuchism for spiritual purposes, while, based on this passage, a number of early Christians believed that, through self-castration, they would achieve chastity, reaching moral perfection, also thereby highlighting their sharp contrast with pagans in sexual conduct.[83]

However, it is broadly believed that, since Jesus expressed this teaching within the wider context of divorce, Matthew/Jesus used eunuchism metaphorically, as hyperbole for voluntary abstinence/celibacy.[84] Jesus sees celibacy as a gift, which

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[80] Leslie J. Hoppe, *Deuteronomy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1985), p. 48. For more on these biblical prohibitions of shaving and cutting the body, see Saul M. Olyan, 'The Biblical Prohibition of the Mourning Rites of Shaving and Laceration: Several Proposals', in *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. by Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), pp. 181-191.

[81] Richard J. Clifford, *Deuteronomy, with an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1982), p. 124.

[82] A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), p. 315.

[83] Daniel F. Caner, 'The Practice and Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 51.4 (1997), 399.

[84] Benedict T. Viviano, 'The Gospel According to Matthew', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 630-673 (p. 662).

'God bestows on whom he wills, inviting them to freely accept it,'[85] a notion that later Paul repeated as well.[86] Benedict Viviano also links the passage with Paul's teaching on circumcision, according to which, every Christian must live in whatever condition God has ordained for them.[87] In the apostle's words, 'Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but obeying the commandments of God is everything' (1 Cor 7:18-19).

In fact, the most important direct scriptural teaching against body modification is the the fulfillment of circumcision by baptism. It is well-known that, in the Old Testament, there is an explicit mandate to Abraham in favour of the application of circumcision to every man wholesale, as a 'token of the covenant' between God and people (Gen 17:11-14) and a sign of faith in Him, 'which professes that *fruitfulness* and life come from the covenant relationship with God and not from human virility alone.'[88] Circumcision is also mentioned and imposed in Exodus, as a requirement for participation in the Passover meal (Ex 12:43-49), as it became an essential rite of the males of the chosen people in exile.[89] Additionally, in Ezekiel, there is a clear prohibition to the uncircumcised 'in heart and flesh' to enter God's sanctuary (Ez 44:7-9), while, even more, in some Old Testament passages, the epithet 'uncircumcised' is even used as an insult (e.g., Judg 15:18 and 1 Sam 14:6).

In the New Testament, although Jesus Himself, prior to His baptism in the Jordan river (Mt 3:13-17, Mk 1:9-11, Lk 3:21-23, Jn 1:29-33), chose to be circumcised (Lk 2:21), showing 'how to observe more safely what the Old Law prescribed, adding to it counsels of perfection,'[90] He, not abolishing but renovating and fulfilling the Old Law, introduced baptism, commanding also His disciples to baptise everyone in the

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[85] Mary Healy, *Men and Women are from Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2005), p. 60.
[86] 'I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind' (1 Cor 7:7).
[87] Viviano, p. 662.
[88] The Pontifical Biblical Commission, *What is Man?: A Journey through Biblical Anthropology*, transl. by Fearghus O'Fearghail and Adrian Graffy (London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 2021), p. 208.
[89] Richard J. Clifford and Roland E. Murphy, 'Genesis', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 8-43 (p. 22).
[90] Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 107, a. 2. All the translations of *Summa Theologiae* (*ST*), unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. by Timothy McDermott (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1989).

name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Based on that, Apostle Paul, teaching that external, corporeal means are insignificant, declares that circumcision has no value at all (Gal 5:2), while he adds that 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything!' (Gal 6:15). Similarly, to the Colossians, he notes, 'you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by the removal of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.' (Col 2:11-12). In Paul's view, baptism, which is made directly by God and not by barren compliance with the law, will be rewarded not by humans but by God Himself (Rom 2:27-29). Even more, in his epistle to the Romans, he remarks that the true Christian is not the one who looks externally faithful, and real circumcision is not the one made on the flesh. Truly faithful is the one who loves and worships God internally, whilst the real circumcision is that of the heart,[91] in the spirit.

Through baptism, not only a member, but the entire body of sin is destroyed and all sin, both the original and one's own, is pardoned. This is why Paul advised people to devote every part of their body to God and not to evil desires and wickedness (Rom 6:13), while he also characterises body mutilators as 'dogs' and 'evil workers', for 'it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil 3:2-3).[92] The total transformation of the flesh will be done by God. Physical circumcision merely constitutes the mutilation of the flesh, but 'a spiritual and moral circumcision of the heart' pleases God more, for external marks have absolutely no value for this eschatological destination.[93] With the transition from Judaism to Christianity, the 'brotherhood of blood' is transmuted into the 'brotherhood of Spirit', a community of equality that includes women too.[94]

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[91] However, the circumcision 'of the heart' was already mentioned in the Old Testament by Jeremiah: 'Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts' (Jer 4:4).

[92] The Greek word *karatome* that Paul uses can be translated as both 'mutilation' and 'circumcision', so it is possible that the Apostle referred to both practices. See Dennis SJ Hamm, Peter Williamson, and Mary Healy, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2013), p. 127. For more on Paul's perception of circumcision, see Ryan D. Collman, *The Apostle to the Foreskin: Circumcision in the Letters of Paul* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

[93] Brendan Byrne, 'The Letter to the Philippians', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 791-797 (p. 796).

[94] Leonie J. Archer, 'Bound by Blood: Circumcision and Menstrual Taboo in Post-exilic Judaism', in *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Janet Martin Soskice (London: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 38-61 (p. 53).

Finally, despite the fact that both Testaments repudiate self-castration, in Isaiah, God announces that eunuchs who are pure in spirit and keep His commands will be saved (Is 56:1-5), while in the book of Acts, Apostle Philip accepts to baptise a eunuch of strong faith in God (Acts 8:26-40). The two scriptural events are closely related, since, although, as mentioned, Deuteronomy 23:1 forbids eunuchs from entering the temple of God and becoming members of His people, St. Philip baptised the eunuch because, through Is 56:1-5, God promised that eunuchs who believe would be eventually welcomed to join His people.[95] Thus, one could say that the passage of the New Testament is the fulfilment of God's promise in the writings of the prophet, while the two stories offer a 'reconceptualization of a fully inclusive religious community.'[96]

2.4. Piercing and Tattooing in the Bible

As for piercing specifically, although the practice is not referred to in the New Testament, earrings are mentioned frequently in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Gen 24:22, Gen 35:2-4, Ex 35:22, Num 31:50, Judg 8:24), which proves that their use was highly popular amongst the Israelites of the time. However, the use of this type of ornament is often related to faith in false gods, the most notable example of which is the making of the golden calf from earrings (Ex 32:2-4). Nevertheless, interestingly, two pertinent passages are found, in which God Himself orders that when slaves want to declare their love and dedication to their master, they should have their ear pierced with an awl (Ex 21:6, Deut 15:17-18). Besides embellishment and idolatry, therefore, the practice of piercing, especially ear piercing, was correlated with enslavement and human property, but with God's approval.[97]

Regarding tattoos, Leviticus is the only scriptural book in which a direct prohibition by God concerning their application exists: 'You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord' (Lev 19:27-

[95] William S. Kurz, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), p. 174; Richard J. Dillon, 'Acts of the Apostles', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 722-767 (p. 743).
[96] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 9.
[97] Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Deuteronomy', in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 94-109 (p. 102).

28). However, it is widely accepted that these practices were not considered evil per se, but were forbidden by God because they were associated with paganism and idolatry. As the Eastern Orthodox biblical exegete and priest, Joel Giannakopoulos, reports, the unambiguous command against body modification was due to the fact that it was a common Middle Eastern habit, closely associated with paganism, while especially tattooing, he adds, was a particularly well-known practice of Eastern people 'regularly accompanied by idolatry.'[98] In addition, during that time, when one had a tattoo, one was considered to be devoted to fake gods, becoming their servant, and this exactly is the reason why the practice was condemned by Yahweh, while tattooing was one of the magic mourning practices of pagan people used to enforce, as a means of appearance change in order to avoid recognition by the departed spirit and ward it off.[99] Devotion to idols, therefore, and not the actual practice of tattooing is what Leviticus prohibits. Finally, as some exegetes saw, the passage does not prohibit tattooing for these reasons alone but also because the practice was commonly used for slave marking.[100]

According to some thinkers, the first implementation of tattooing in history derives from God Himself, as, in the book of Genesis, due to Abel's fratricide by Cain, God expels the latter after putting a sign on his body to protect him from other people who may want to punish him (Gen 4:13-15). Although Genesis does not describe what exactly this mark was, it is assumed that it was visible, whilst some speculate that it was a Hebrew letter placed on Cain's arm or forehead.[101] This 'mark of Cain' is not condemnatory, but a sign that designates his origin and constitutes a stigma of divine protection.[102] Nevertheless, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to clarify that any reference to the application of tattooing by divine intervention is symbolic. Moreover, in Exodus, God commands His people to put a sign on their forehead as a reminder that He brought them out of Egypt (Ex 13:8-9),

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[98] Joel Giannakopoulos, *Η Παλαιά Διαθήκη κατά τους Ο': Κείμενον, Ερμηνευτική παράφρασις, Σχόλια, Τόμος Πρώτος* (*The Old Testament for O': Text, Interpretation, Paraphrase, Comments, Vol. 1*) (Thessaloniki: Lydia, 1986), p. 138.
[99] Faley, 74.
[100] Rosanne Liebermann, 'Clothing and Body Modification in Hebrew Bible', *Religion Compass*, 15.3 (2021), 11. For more on this association between the prohibition of tattooing in Leviticus and human 'enslavement, see John Huehnergard and Harold Liebowitz, 'The Biblical Prohibition Against Tattooing', *Vetus Testamentum*, 63.1 (2013), 59-77.
[101] John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 120.
[102] Ieremias Fountas, *Γένεσις: Κείμενο, Μετάφραση, Ανάλυση, Σχόλια* (*Genesis: Text, Translation, Analysis, Comments*) (Athens: Apostolic Diakonia, 2004), p. 393.

while an analogous reference to such a sign exists in Ezekiel, who cites God's words: 'Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it" (Ez 9:4). Consequently, one could say that, albeit God is against tattooing, in some cases, He orders its application or even 'applies' it Himself. Of course, in these cases, one should consider the moral difference between autonomous human acts and acts executed by divine mandate.[103]

Isaiah's book mentions that, during the revival of Jerusalem, some people will mark on their hands the phrase 'The Lord's' (Is 44:5), desiring to return to the faith of their ancestors.[104] However, as Nili Fox articulates 'whether "marking" in the text was meant to be interpreted literally or metaphorically, as perhaps "a spiritual sign",' remains unclear.[105] Also, in the same book, there is the symbolic verse, 'See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me' (Is 49:16), according to which, the Lord Himself permanently painted on His hands the walls of Jerusalem because He wants to always see it bright and glorious.[106] Interestingly, in 2019, Pope Francis mentioned the passage, linking it with God's love and tattoos:

> Tattoos are in fashion today: 'I have graven you on the palms of my hands.' I have tattooed you on my hands. Thus, I am in God's hands; it cannot be removed. God's love is like a mother's love that can never be forgotten. And if a mother forgets? 'I will never forget', says the Lord. This is God's perfect love.[107]

As already mentioned, in ancient Greek, the tattoo was called 'stigma', which means 'mark'. Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, distinguishes this stigma from the marks of Jesus and refers to the stigmas that he carries on his body, saying, 'From now on, let no one make trouble for me, for I carry the marks (*stigmata*) of Jesus branded on my body' (Gal 6:17). Paul here refers to the tortures and hazards he

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[103] Shuma Iwai, 'A Controversial Debate over the Interpretation of Tattooing in the Bible: An Ethnohermeneutics Approach from "Rice to Bread"', *Exchange*, 39.2, (2010), 151.
[104] Joel Giannakopoulos, *Η Παλαιά Διαθήκη κατά τους Ο': Κείμενον, Ερμηνευτική παράφρασις, Σχόλια, Τόμος Έκτος* (*The Old Testament for O': Text, Interpretation, Paraphrase, Comments, Vol. 6*) (Thessaloniki: Lydia, 1986), p. 318.
[105] Nili S. Fox, 'Biblical Regulation of Tattooing in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Practices', in *Fashioned Selves: Dress and Identity in Antiquity*, ed. by Megan Cifarelli (Oxford; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Oxbow Books Limited, 2019), pp. 89-104 (p. 98).
[106] Giannakopoulos, *Vol. 6*, p. 354.
[107] Pope Francis, *General Audience* (20/02/2019).

suffers and to the marks that they left on his body, which he carries as medals and evidence of faith.[108] Nevertheless, some scholars interestingly connected this passage with tattooing. For Mark Gustafson, for example, maybe Paul here is also 'deliberately invoking the degrading practice of punitive tattooing,'[109] while, as Charles W. MacQuarrie saw, 'It is not impossible that Paul is saying that he has marked himself with a sign (possibly a cross) of his devotion to Christ.'[110] However, it is true that these claims lack sufficient theological scholarly evidence.

The book of Revelation refers to the sign of the Beast on people's right hand or foreheads, which is 'the name of the beast or the number for its name' (Rev 13:16-17). This sign will transform into an ugly wound 'on those who had the brand of the beast and who worshiped its image' (Rev 16:2), in a passage that, in the view of Candida Moss, links physical ugliness with moral corruption.[111] Against this mark, the book of Revelation juxtaposes the divine stigma, written on the foreheads of the people of God (Rev 7:2-3, 14:1) and even on the thigh of the Word of God (Rev 19:16), as God's seal, which indicates that His servants are under His protection and belong to Him.[112] With a similar stigma was St. Macrina's body marked by God, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, as he describes his sister's final moments:

> When the time came to cover the body with the robe, the injunction of the great lady made it necessary for me to perform this function. The woman who was present and sharing the great assignment with us said: 'Do not pass over the greatest of the miracles of the saint.' 'What is that?' I asked. She laid bare a part of the breast and said: 'Do you see this thin, almost imperceptible, scar below the neck?' It was like a mark made, by a small needle. At the same time, she brought the lamp nearer to the place she was showing me. 'What is miraculous about that,' I said, 'if the body has a

[108] Dimitrios P. Rizos, *Οσίου Πατρός ημών Νικόδημου του Αγιορείτου, Ερμηνεία εις τας ιδ' Επιστολάς του Αποστόλου Παύλου, Τόμος Δεύτερος* (*Holy Father Nicodemos of Mount Athos, Interpretation in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, Vol. 2*) (Thessaloniki: Kypseli, 1990), p. 354.
[109] Mark Gustafson, 'The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond', in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. by Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 29.
[110] Charles W. MacQuarrie, 'Insular Cetltic Tattooing: History, Myth, and Metaphor', in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. by Jane Caplan (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 32-45 (p. 36).
[111] Candida R. Moss, *Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 111.
[112] Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), p. 155.

small mark here?' She said: 'This is left on the body as a reminder of the great help of God.'[113]

Likewise, finally, the God-sent *stigmata* of other pious people, such as St. Francis of Assisi, are well-known.

In summary, the biblical passages examined in this chapter reflect a profound respect for the beauty and integrity of the human body as a creation of God, leading to a generally sceptical, if not negative, stance towards bodily beautification and modification. Moreover, while the Bible primarily condemns tattooing for its connections to idolatry and paganism, permanent bodily stigma is occasionally approved, while, similarly, piercing is sometimes viewed as sinful when associated with sin, yet at other times, it receives divine approval. Thus, one can say that the Bible neither absolutely rejects nor unequivocally commends the practices of tattooing and piercing.

This chapter has laid the foundation by examining relevant biblical passages related to the examined topic. As the Bible serves as a shared foundation for both the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, informing their subsequent theological teachings, establishing this scriptural basis prepares us to explore the distinct theological perspectives of each tradition in the following chapters.

[113] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of St. Macrina*; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 58: Ascetical Works*, transl. by Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 185. For an interesting association between Macrina's sign and tattooing, see Virginia Burrus, 'Macrina's Tattoo', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33.3 (2003), 403–417.

CHAPTER 3: PERSPECTIVES FROM EASTERN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

With the scriptural foundation established, we now enter the distinct theological chapters, beginning with the one on the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This chapter consists of an introduction that outlines Orthodox moral theology and anthropology, followed by four sections. The first section delves into the intricacies of the human body, exploring its inherent value, dignity, and the profound relationship it shares with the soul. It also reflects on the authority vested in human beings over their own physical selves. The second section focuses on physical beauty, beautification, and art, all of which are intimately linked with the practices of tattooing and body-piercing. In the third section, the emphasis sharpens on body modification, as it examines the stance of Orthodoxy regarding tampering with the human body, while section four, building upon the preceding research, serves as an inferential chapter, culminating in a comprehensive examination of the tradition's viewpoints regarding the case studies in question. Let's begin with the introductory section.

Human creation in God's image and likeness is the central axis and the basis of Orthodox anthropology and hence speaking of the human body, and consequently of the human person in general, we could not fail to take these terms under consideration. After all, the coexistence of body and soul in humans is the main precondition for their creation in the image of God. With respect to this, Kallistos Ware asserts, 'Because Man is body, he shares in the material world around him, which passes within him through his sense perceptions. Because Man is Mind (Soul), he belongs to the world of higher reality and pure spirit. Because he is both, he is… "God's crowned image".'[114] Just as images acquire value because of what they portray, human beings exist and gain value in relation to God, whom they depict, created in His image. This image reveals our spiritual kinship with God and manifests the blessings that He bestowed upon us. From our creation in His image, therefore, follows humanity's supremacy over the rest of creation[115] as well as our inherent

[114] Kallistos Ware, 'Through Creation to the Creator', in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 86-105 (p. 102).

[115] However, this supremacy should be understood not as domination, but as a call to responsible stewardship and respect for the environment, recognising the interconnectedness of all creation and aligning with contemporary theological reflections on humanity's relationship with the natural world. For more, see Antonios A. Mazneikos, *Οι Απόψεις της Ορθόδοξης Ανατολικής Εκκλησίας για την Προστασία και την Αειφορία του Φυσικού Περιβάλλοντος* (*Eastern Orthodox Church's Views on the Protection and Sustainability of Natural Environment*) (Athens: Myrmidones, 2013).

dignity, which underscores the sacredness of human life. Triune God is depicted in every human being, who, through God, becomes a perfect person and carries all of humanity, just as every person of the Holy Trinity carries the wholeness of divinity.[116] All these justify inalienable human rights, which, for Orthodox theology, stem from kinship with God. As Stanley Harakas affirms, 'Human rights reside in us as witnesses to the irreducible dignity which we have as creatures created in the image and likeness of God.'[117]

However, the image of God is insufficient to give a complete answer to ethical questions, as, in Nellas' words, 'experience proves that the historical reality of man is different from that… defined by the phrase "in the image." In the Christian perception of things this is to be ascribed to the fact that the historical reality develops within the unnatural situation in which man has found himself since the fall.'[118] The Fall, therefore, affected not only the condition of the body but also the image of God and the nature of humanity. By disobeying God and cutting off all communication with Him, humans also ceased to resemble Him. Just as one's reflection blurs the more one moves away from the mirror, so the image of God fades when humans move away from Him. Still, thanks to the Incarnation of Christ, despite any moral relegation of the body, the image of God has not been completely destroyed, but simply 'wounded'.[119] Thus, even in the sinful flesh, there remains the possibility for restoration, renewal, and eventually *theosis*.[120] As St. Athanasius the Great, put it, Christ 'was made man that we might be made God.'[121]

Regarding *theosis*, in addition to the aforementioned blessings, God also provided humans with the tendency towards their eschatological end, the divine similitude, which will be experienced after our resurrection not only spiritually but also

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[116] Miltiadis Vantsos, *Η Ιερότητα της Ζωής* (*The Sanctity of Life*) (Thessaloniki: Sfakianaki Publishing, 2003), pp. 34-35.

[117] Stanley S. Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues Facing the Orthodox Christian* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Light & Life Pub Co, 1982), p. 131. For the approach of Orthodox theology to human rights in general, see Ioannis Kaminis, 'The Reception of Human Rights in the Eastern Orthodox Theology: Challenges and Perspectives', in *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, ed. by Hans-Peter Grosshans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Paderborn: Schöningh-Brill, 2022), pp. 252-272.

[118] Panagiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, transl. by Norman Russell (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 43.

[119] Efthimios, Metropolitan of Acheloos, *Η Σαρξ: Ορθόδοξη Θεολογική Θεώρηση του Σώματος* (*The Flesh: Orthodox Theological Consideration of the Body*) (Athens: Grigoris, 2005), p. 130.

[120] *Theosis* is the Greek word for 'deification' and, according to Eastern Christian theology, the union with or the likeness to God.

[121] Athanasius the Great, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 332.

somatically. Thus, the image of God is the potentiality to resemble God and His likeness is the realisation of this very potentiality. This is exactly why it is our duty to constantly improve spiritually and physically in this temporal life, until we reach the very end of deification, or else *theosis*, in the everlasting one. 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48), as Christ Himself exhorted. Hence, humans perpetually journey from being made in the image to embodying the likeness, from the finite to the infinite, from imperfection towards perfection.[122] In the words of Andrew Louth, for the Eastern Fathers, to be created in the image and likeness of God means 'that we have been created with some kind of affinity for God which makes possible a process of assimilation to God, which is, presumably, the point of human existence.'[123]

This continuous evolution entails two ethical criteria: first, that human life is fulfilled through fellowship with God, and second, that human beings, as social creatures, can reach perfection through social life. Thus, constant communion with both God and fellow human beings is the key to our spiritual enhancement. Additionally, for Eastern Orthodox theology, which is profoundly personalistic,[124] through creation in the image of God, every human being is individual and totally unique. Every person, therefore, lives and moves between individuality, on the one hand, and sociability, on the other. Although every human is an unrepeatable and unique person, human beings, theologically speaking, are *homoiousian*, while, as Yannaras puts it, 'a human being realizes its hypostasis as *prosopon* (person) only when it finds itself in a communion of love with all other persons.'[125] Even more, personhood is identified in every human being wholesale, for it is not affirmed by social, medical, or biophysical characteristics, but by the source of life, that is, God.

[122] Vasileios Tsigkos, *Δογματική της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας* (*Dogmatics of Orthodox Theology*) (Thessaloniki: Omstracon Publishing, 2017), pp. 229-231.
[123] Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 148.
[124] However, it is worth noting that there is an ongoing debate about whether Eastern Orthodox theology can be categorised as 'personalistic', likely due to concerns about philosophical influences in theology. For further discussion on this debate, see John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
[125] Christos Yannaras, *Τίμιοι με την Ορθοδοξία: Νεοελληνικά Θεολογικά Δοκίμια* (*Honest with Orthodoxy: Modem Greek Theological Essays*) (Athens: Aster, 1968), p. 21.

He, with our birth, gives us the ability to give the world back to Him 'and it is only in this act of offering that we become genuinely human and truly free.'[126]

Moreover, for Orthodox ethics, within Creation, only human nature is associated with reason and free will, or else *autexousion*, as Eastern Orthodox theology calls it, our capacity to make rational and autonomous decisions for our life. God's likeness, therefore, reveals one's free choice to create a relationship of love and communion with God and is the fulfillment of one's existence in resembling the Creator. However, the fact that God created humans as autonomous beings, allowing them to act as they pleases, does not imply that every human choice is correct. In other words, free will represents our ability to consciously choose between good and evil, granting us the liberty to lead either a moral or immoral life. Humans are allowed by God to choose between the two and those who decide to follow the way of virtue will be rewarded by God.[127]

Thus, although Eastern Orthodox theology respects autonomy, it does not conform to its 'absolutisation' and the extreme emphasis given to it by modern bioethics. However, it does not conform to complete heteronomy either. What Orthodox ethics suggests is a morality that begins with heteronomy and ends with autonomy; one that starts with compliance with God's commandments and leads to the restoration of humanity's original condition.[128] As Maria Bouri puts it, 'autonomy is viewed as man's liberation from dominance by worldly concerns, from what distracts and distorts him from his ultimate purpose in activating likeness to God, whereas defending autonomy implies both protecting confinement in natural limits and negating continuous exodus from man's finite existence towards true being.'[129] Humans, as the only material beings created in the image of God, become partakers of divine freedom, on the condition that they communicate with God and obey His commandments. Human freedom meets the freedom of God, not in confrontation but in *synergia* (cooperation), while human free will, granted by God, does not exist by

[126] Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *In the World, yet not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. by John Chryssavgis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 116.
[127] Daniel M. Varghese, 'Personhood and Bioethics: An Eastern Perspective', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 6.4 (2015), 134.
[128] Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική Ηθική Ι: Εισαγωγή, Γενικές Αρχές, Σύγχρονη Προβληματική* (*Christian Ethics I: Introduction, Basic Principles, Contemporary Concerns*) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2008), p. 127.
[129] Maria Bouri, 'Medicine, Suffering and Death: Palliation and the Ethics of Caring for Those we cannot Cure' in *Orthodox Christianity and Modern Science: Past, Present and Future*, ed. by Kostas Tampakis and Haralambos Ventis (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2022), pp. 83-118 (p. 110).

itself, but only through its participation in the absolute freedom of God.[130] God granted humans complete freedom to move towards good or evil in order to educate them and make them virtuous, as no virtue is imposed by force, but is achieved only by positive volition. However, sin was the most dramatic effect of this freedom. Adam and Eve, autonomously turning away from God, introduced sin, causing their bodies to become perishable and mortal. This original sin, for Orthodox theology, is the sin of pride. As Athanasius, for instance, put it, humans did not fall because of prostitution, adultery, or robbery, but because of pride, and this is exactly why pride is 'the essence of death.'[131] We, albeit created sinless by nature, were - and are - able, through free will, to turn to sin, as the only nature into which sin cannot intrude is the divine, and humans, as animals that received the command to become God, became alienated from Him because they betrayed this vocation.

However, even in this case, for the Fathers of the Eastern Church, God's love towards humans is visible, since death and pain were not established as vengeance, but were 'beneficially bestowed' so that the original sin does not remain unpunished and deathless.[132] 'It was to make us better, more temperate and more compliant to him, which is the basis of complete salvation,'[133] as Chrysostom writes, while, in the phrase of St. Nicholas Cabasilas, pain and decay were permitted by God not as a penalty but rather as 'a remedy for him who had fallen into sickness.'[134] Precisely for this reason, the Orthodox Church teaches the 'good decay', the one that is understood as the acceptance of the created and imperfect human nature and does not cause sorrow, but joy, since it provides the possibility for the movement towards 'the perfection that has no end.'[135] Although, therefore, we moved away from God, we

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[130] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 14.26; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 107: Select Orations*, transl. by Martha Vinson (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), pp. 58-59.

[131] Athanasius the Great, *On Virginity*, 5 (translated by the author).

[132] Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Χριστιανική Ηθική ΙΙ: Άνθρωπος και Θεός, Άνθρωπος και Συνάνθρωπος, Υπαρξιακές και Βιοηθικές Θέσεις και Προοπτικές* (*Christian Ethics II: Man and God, Man and Fellow Man, Existential and Bioethical Views and Perspectives*) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2009), p. 638.

[133] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hannah*, 1.2; *Old Testament Homilies, Vol. 1: Homilies on Hannah, David and Soul*, transl. by Robert Charles Hill (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003), p. 70.

[134] Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, 1.10; *The Life in Christ*, transl. by Carmino J. deCatanzaro (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 58.

[135] Konstantinos Kornarakis, 'Η Θεολογική Θεώρηση των Γενετικών Εξετάσεων (Genetic Tests) ως Υπόμνημα Κριτικής Ανθρωπολογίας στη Σύγχρονη Κοινωνία', στο *Κήρυγμα και Ευχαριστία, Χαριστήριος Τόμος προς τιμήν του Παναγιωτάτου Μητροπολίτου Θεσσαλονίκης Ανθίμου - Συλλογικός Τόμος* ('The Theological Consideration of Genetic Tests as a note of Critical Anthropology in Modern Society', in *Sermon and Eucharist: Tribute Volume in honor of His Holiness Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki - Edited Volume*) (Athens: Armos Publications, 2009), pp. 397-427 (p. 418).

still can, in Christ, progress 'from one degree of glory to another' (2 Cor 3:18), reach our authentic personhood, and achieve salvation, which can only be realised with synergy, our cooperation with God.[136] Human beings are neither completely mortal nor immortal, since we are all receptive to both situations, and human flesh is neither perishable nor imperishable, for it oscillates between mortality and immortality.[137]

As to whether God's image and likeness refer to both body and soul or only to the latter, this is one of the few instances of disagreement among Eastern theologians. According to some of them, such as Panagiotis Trembelas, the image does not refer to the human body, but only to the incorporeal component of the human being. On the contrary, for the dogmatist, Nikos Matsoukas, and others, although the image of God is found in the spiritual and mental nature of humanity, this does not mean that it does not refer to the totality of the psychosomatic human nature.[138] It is a fact that this discrepancy can be already traced back to the patristic period, as some Church Fathers associated the image of God exclusively with the soul, whereas some others held that it also refers to the body. Nevertheless, as Nellas explains, Eastern Orthodoxy always saw the body as participating in the image and likeness of God and the reason why the term has been 'enriched with the most varied meanings' is because it was 'corresponding each time with the problems which have to be faced.'[139] After all, given that the soul is not divided from the body and human beings are one undivided unity, the exclusion of the body from the image and likeness of God would be in line with dualism, which, as will be analysed subsequently, Orthodoxy rejects. As Irenaeus, very early, wrote,

> By the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.[140]

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[136] John Breck, *The Sacred Gift of Life* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), pp. 29-31.
[137] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, 1.7; *Ad Autolycum*, transl. by Robert M. Grant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 11.
[138] Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-first Century* (Athens: World Council of Churches, 2012), pp. 42-43.
[139] Nellas, p. 22.
[140] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 5.6.1; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), pp. 892-893.

Humans, therefore, on the one hand, are imperfect and cannot fully comprehend the perfect essence of God and, on the other, they can be deified. Regarding this seeming paradox, for Orthodox theology, man is a *zoon theoumenon*, 'an animal that is being deified.' The human being constitutes an animal with a physical body that eats, drinks, and expresses interpersonal love through sexual union in 'one flesh', but, at the same time, an animal endowed with conscience, capable of mystical union with God as well as an animal that, looking up to Heaven, brings it close to the earth.[141] 'A living creature trained here, and then moved elsewhere; and, to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God,' as Gregory of Nazianzus put it.[142] For the Orthodox understanding of the human person, although the divergence between this animal's and God's nature is huge, we, as humans, are the living images of the transcendent God and we have the potential to eschatologically become like God, to achieve *theosis*, likeness, deification, divinization.[143] This divine bestowal, after the introduction of sin, is offered through Incarnation, since the Word took on human nature and deified it. Thus, deification is highly associated with the Incarnation of Jesus, as one cannot resemble God without God's prior movement toward human beings. God entered the human and temporal life so that we can enter the heavenly and everlasting one. In the words of Athanasius the Great, God assumed a human body in order to renew and deify it in Himself,

> And thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness. For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father's presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body. And as we had not been delivered from sin and the curse, unless it had been by nature human flesh, which the Word put on (for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign), so also the man had not been deified, unless the Word who became flesh had been by nature from the Father and true and proper to Him.[144]

Concerning deification, the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor is particularly interesting, as *theosis* is a key term for his theology. According to him, God embraces

[141] The Greek word *anthropos* comes from the verb *anarthrein*, which means 'to look up'.
[142] Gregory of Nazianzus, 38.11; Vinson transl., pp. 212.
[143] Kallistos Ware, 'The Unity of the Human Person According to the Greek Fathers', in *Persons and Personality: A Contemporary Inquiry*, ed. by Arthur Peacocke and Grant Gillett (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 1987), pp. 197-206 (p. 202).
[144] Athanasius the Great, *Discourse II Against the Arians*, 70; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 4*, pp. 985-986.

both body and soul and renders them like Him in due proportion. Regarding this soul and body wholeness, Maximus connects the four 'general' virtues (or else 'cardinal', as the Catholic tradition calls them), *phronesis* (moral judgement), courage, temperance, and justice, which 'are not simply properties of the soul but, so to speak, actualized embodied states',[145] with the five sense/psychic faculty pairs. In his words,

> The virtue of understanding (phronesis) is realized through cognitive and scientific activity when the soul's intellectual and rational potential is made to converge with the senses of sight and hearing in the actual apprehension of their respective objects of sensation. Courage arises from the highest equilibrium that is realized through the convergence of the spirited power with olfaction, that is, through the nostrils, which, as they say, are the courtyard of the breath, in the natural vicinity of its related objects of sense. Temperance is realized through the convergence of the measured use of the desiring power with the sensation of taste, again, in conjunction with the respective organ of sense. Justice is realized through the equal, ordered, and harmonious distribution of vital power to more or less all objects of sense perception through the sense of touch.[146]

Finally, God will not make His dwelling to everyone, but only to those who have earned it through spiritual life and practised His divine commandments in love while in the body. And, although this will happen to the fullest after the general resurrection, some extremely pious saints, already in their earthly life, bear witness to it in their souls, a grace that is extended in their bodies as well. As John Climacus, in his highly influential treatise for monasticism in Eastern Christianity, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*,[147] wrote, 'a man flooded with the love of God reveals in his body, as if in a mirror, the splendor of his soul, a glory like that of Moses when he came face to face with God… the bodies of these incorruptible men are immune to sickness, for

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[145] Nellas, p. 55.

[146] Maximus the Confessor, *The Ambigua to John*; *On the Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua, Vol. 1*, ed. and transl. by Nicholas Constas (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 431-433. However, it is worth noting that, as Hamalis and Papanikolaou articulate, while the Western Christian distinction between theological and cardinal virtues is generally foreign to Eastern thought, *theosis* and the virtues, along with liturgical life, have always been organically intertwined: 'Worship and sacraments aim at theosis; theosis entails the acquisition of the virtues; and the virtues are cultivated within the lives of the faithful by their repeated activity together as a sacramental community.' Perry T. Hamalis and Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Toward a Godly Mode of Being: Virtue as Embodied Deification', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 26.3 (2013), 278.

[147] John Chryssavgis calls *The Ladder* 'the apotheosis of desert asceticism and the masterpiece of Byzantine spiritual guidance.' John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2004), p. 10.

their bodies have been sanctified and rendered incorruptible by the flame of chastity which has put out the flame.'[148] The splendour and radiance of the bodies of these people were manifested by Christ Himself in His glorious Transfiguration.

3.1. The Human Body

According to Plato, the word *soma* (body) derives from the word *sema* (tomb), as, for Platonism, God, in order to punish the soul, imprisoned it in the body. The salvation of the soul, therefore, was directly related to its dissociation from the human body and its liberation from any fleshly desire and activity.[149] In Platonic thought, the self is distinct from the flesh, hence, to know oneself means to attend to one's soul, excluding the body.[150] This Platonic dualism between body and soul found many followers, while, regardless of the aforementioned biblical appraisal of the body, these views also influenced several early Christian thinkers, according to whom, the purification and salvation of the soul will ultimately take place when it will be liberated from the sinful body through death.[151] This is exactly why spiritual life requires the suffering of the body and the release of the spirit from anything physical. In Origen's words, for example, 'Just as those who endure tortures and suffering demonstrate in martyrdom an excellence more illustrious than those not tested in this way, so also those who by using their great love for God have broken and torn part such worldly bonds as these in addition to their love of the body and life.'[152] Origen's teachings, especially on the pre-existence of the soul,[153] before his condemnation by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD, had a great impact on the thought of early Christianity, both in the East and the West.[154]

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[148] John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 30; *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, transl. by Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 288.

[149] Ierotheos Vlachos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and St. Blaise, *Το Σώμα του Ανθρώπου: Η Άσκηση και η Άθλησή του* (*The Body of Man: Its Exercise and Physical Activity*) (Athens: Apostolic Diakonia of Greek Church, 2002), pp. 9-10.

[150] James F. Keenan, 'Current Theology Note: Christian Perspectives on the Human Body', *Theological Studies*, 55.2 (1994), 335.

[151] See Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[152] Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom*; *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, transl. by Rowan Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 52.

[153] See Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, 'Preexistence', in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. by John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville, Kentucky; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 178-179

[154] However, some scholars saw the rejection of the body as coming not from Origen himself, but from his later 'self-declared heirs', the Origenists. See Jonathan Bieler, 'Origen on the Goodness of the

In modern times, the influences of various philosophical and ideological currents, especially those expressed in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, have resulted in the dissociation of the body from the soul and of human nature from the divine. Based on their autonomy, modern humans came to the conclusion that they did not need the divine presence and declared themselves gods. Now, the prevailing view is that persons are independent beings, who are able to evolve only through their minds and their inner powers, whilst our reason is limited to understanding material things, failing to know our neighbour and God.[155] Just as Adam and Eve terminated their relationship with God and felt ashamed of their naked bodies, diminishing their value and dignity, modern humans, repeating the original sin, consider their bodies machines and their organs simple marketed objects. All these resulted in the objectification, devaluation, and, consequently, belittlement of the moral significance of the human body.

For the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the human body is an integral part of Orthodox spirituality, as activities such as prayer and participation in the sacraments of the Church are deeply physical. Moreover, spiritual life requires not the repudiation of the flesh, but of the sin, which stems from carnal desires, while the morality or not of bodily acts depends on the will of the soul and the spiritual condition of the person. As Cyril of Jerusalem wrote, 'Tell me not that the body is a cause of sin. For if the body is a cause of sin, why does not a dead body sin? Put a sword in the right hand of one just dead, and no murder takes place. Let beauties of every kind pass before a youth just dead, and no impure desire arises. Why? Because the body sins not of itself, but the soul through the body.'[156] The Orthodox should neither abhor the body nor degrade it, considering it simply a means to an end, since the renewal and fulfilment in Christ are not limited to the human soul alone but also to the human flesh. In the words of Chrysostomos Stamoulis:

> The assumption of the whole of human nature by God the Word demonstrates the sanctity of the integral human being and, consequently, frees its bodily form from guilt. The human being in Orthodoxy is either saved in its entirety or is not saved at all... Thus, the goal is not

Body', in *Sacrality and Materiality: Locating Intersections*, ed. by Rebecca A. Giselbrecht and Ralph Kunz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 91-100.

[155] See Stelian Gombos, 'Bioethics in the Vision of Orthodox Theology', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 31.1 (2019), 109-110.

[156] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 4.23; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 7* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 139.

> deliverance from the body, as Plato would have it, but a change in the human being, its transformation and sanctification.[157]

All the dualistic approaches, therefore, both ancient and contemporary, are rejected, as body and soul are inseparable and humans constitute undivided psychosomatic entities. On the one hand, the soul is undeniably superior to the body, as it gives life to it and governs its activity.[158] And, since the soul is nobler than the body, whoever values the latter more is 'a worshipper of idols.'[159] On the other hand, however, any attempt to devalue the human body is sacrilegious, alien to the Orthodox teaching, and an insult to the Creator, who initially created humans both physical and spiritual. Thus, the idea of some Christians that the body is an obstacle to the real purpose of human existence and useless in their quest to attain deification is repudiated. These misconceptions led many to stand against the body, oppose it, and even humiliate it, in the name of Christ, clearly misunderstanding the actual Christian teaching on the existence of sin primarily in the soul and incidentally in the body.

Since, therefore, sin is first spiritual and then physical, Eastern Orthodox ethics teaches that first the soul must be purified from passions. As Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica wrote, 'Stand upright, not with your body but with the movements and inclination of your soul.'[160] And this spiritual 'righteousness' will, in turn, be expressed in the flesh. Also, humans not only should not fight their bodies but love them, treat them properly, and thank God for this very gift.[161] After all, already in the early Church, many Eastern Fathers condemned the view that the body is bad in nature and emphasised the importance of the flesh for the totality of the human person. Dionysius, for instance, expressed the view that the matter is not intrinsically evil, since it too 'hath a share in order, beauty, and form' and evil does not derive from the flesh 'but from a disordered and discordant motion.'[162] Similarly, for another early Church Eastern Father, St. Methodius of Olympus, one cannot exist without a

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[157] Chrysostomos Stamoulis, *Holy Beauty: Prolegomena to an Orthodox Philokalic Aesthetics*, transl. by Norman Russell (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2022), p. 112.
[158] Jean-Claude Larchet, *Theology of the Body*, transl. by Michael Donley (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), p. 20.
[159] Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love*, 1.7; 'Four Hundred Texts on Love', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 2*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 52-113 (p. 53).
[160] Ana Smiljanic, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: The Life and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica* (Platina, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2009), p. 137.
[161] Panagiotis Kapodistrias, *Κεφάλαια Θεολογίας του Περιβάλλοντος* (*Theology of Environment Chapters*) (Zakynthos: Holy Diocese of Zakynthos, 2006), pp. 46-48.
[162] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names*, 4.28; C.E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite: On the Divine Names; And the Mystical Theology* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 1992), pp. 65-66.

body and humans are created very good exactly because they are made up of both body and soul,[163] while, according to Athanasius the Great, humans consist of soul and body, both of which are so important that if one of them is absent, human nature ceases to exist.[164]

During the 4th century, the figures of the three Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory the Theologian (Gregory of Nazianzus), emerged and shaped the Eastern Christian thought of the time. Interpreting Paul, Basil expressed that, as long as the grace of the Holy Spirit occupies the body, it indeed constitutes God's temple, but whether sin and debauchery possess it, it becomes a 'temple of idols'.[165] Somehow analogously, Gregory of Nyssa stressed that, on the one hand, the upright posture of our body confirms 'the difference of dignity' between humans other creatures,[166] but, on the other, we must be particularly careful with our bodies, exactly because they are temples of God, while if we allow sin to enter them, they will be completely destroyed.[167] However, as he saw, it is not the body, but the soul that 'walks in darkness and invents all the evil in this life of ours.'[168] Gregory also repudiated the Platonist and later Origenist pre-existentialist theory, also rejecting dualism and teaching that human beings are one in two substances, body and soul, despite the clear distinction between the two and the supremacy of the latter over the former.[169]

Nevertheless, although the body is not belittled and humans ought to love it, they should not reach the other extreme of 'sarcolatry', that is, the excessive love and worship of the flesh that leads to the abuse of desires and pleasures. This excessive and unreasonable love for ourselves and our bodies, which derives from the ignorance of God, is the 'mother of passions', the sin of attachment to the body, vanity, or else

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[163] Methodius of Olympus, *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.11; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 6* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), pp. 617-618.
[164] Athanasius the Great, *On the Model of Human Nature* (translated by the author).
[165] Basil the Great, *Homilies on Fasting*, 2.7; *On Fasting and Feasts*, transl. by Susan R. Holman and Mark DelCogliano (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), p. 80.
[166] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 8.1; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 729.
[167] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Mode of Life*; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 58: Ascetical Works*, transl. by Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 137.
[168] Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 5* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 646.
[169] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making*, 28-29; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 5*, pp. 782-788.

self-love.[170] This contradictory attitude that the Christian should maintain towards his or her body, was expressed very early by Gregory the Theologian, for whom, on the one hand, we must fight it, due to its passions, but on the other, we must be reconciled to it, because of its divine origin:

> How I came to be joined to it I do not know; nor how I am the image of God and concocted of clay at the same time, this body that both wars against me when it is healthy and when warred against, brings me pain, that I both cherish as my fellow-servant and evade as my enemy; that I both try to escape as my chain and respect as my fellow heir… I show it consideration as a co-worker but I do not know how to suppress its insurgency nor how I can help falling away from God when the weight of its shackles drags me down and keeps me pinioned to the ground. It is an affable enemy and a scheming friend… Before making war, I come to terms with it; before making peace, I am at odds with it. What is this wisdom that I embody? What is this great mystery?[171]

About two centuries later, following Gregory's thought, John Climacus called the body both a friend and an enemy because of the tension between its current corrupted state and its original perfection,[172] while, as St. John of Damascus put it, the Orthodox should revere the body without venerating it. 'I do not venerate matter', he stresses, 'I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake… and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked.'[173]

Basil the Great was the Eastern Father who dealt with the relationship between body and soul the most. Likening the latter to a rider and the former to a horse, Basil asserted,

> The body is not reprehensible to those who are righteous towards it. Just as…the horse is good, and the sharper and stronger it is, the better, but it needs the rider and ruler for itself lacks reason…if, therefore, the rider uses the power of the horse correctly, he both survives and achieves his purpose, but also the horse proves to be an excellent tool. But when the

[170] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, p. 62. Maximus the Confessor, for example, says that self-love, the mindless love for the body', is the origin of all passions, while pride is their 'consummation.' Maximus, *Four Hundred Texts*, 2.3; Palmer transl., p. 92.
[171] Gregory of Nazianzus, 14.6; Vinson transl., p. 43.
[172] Climacus, 9; Luibheid and Russell transl., p. 153.
[173] John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 1.16; *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, transl. by Andrew Louth (Saint Vladimir's Press, 2003), p. 29.

> horseman rides the foal incorrectly, the animal often deviates where there is no road and, even if it returns to the road, the rider's incompetence can sometimes put both at risk. This is how you must think about the soul and the body… for, whether the soul uses the functions of the body properly, it both saves the body and puts herself out of danger. But whether she neglects the work of government and, possessed by the lethargy of apathy, abandons the guidance of the body, then it, because lacks rational thought, deviates from the straight line and entices the soul into evil, not due to its own malice, but because of the soul's indifference. If the passions of the body could not be tamed by the soul, then the body would be responsible; for evil is nothing but the absence of virtue.[174]

Exactly because sin is initiated in the soul, people are urged to be interested first in what the psyche, and not the body, needs, as every decision-making in the Christian life should be guided by an understanding of the superiority of spiritual goodness over the bodily one.[175] Recalling Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6:7-8[176] and referring to the resurrection of the body, Basil claims that when our 'earthly home' is destroyed, we shall have an eternal and heavenly one, made not by human hands but by God. The earthly body, on the one hand, as our home in earthly life, is necessary for our soul, since it cooperates with it. On the other hand, we should not be interested in anything other than serving its basic needs, namely food and shelter, as all things have been given to us by God, to whom they belong. Humans are not the owners but nothing more than the stewards of anything, even of their own bodies.[177] Moreover, in Basil's words, 'with body and soul, the increase of one necessarily produces a decrease in the other. For when the body enjoys well-being and becomes heavy through much fleshiness, the mind is necessarily inactive and slack in its proper activity; but when the soul is in good condition and through care of its own goods is raised up toward its

[174] Basil the Great, *Ascetic Constitutions*, 2.3 (translated by the author).
[175] Almut Caspary, 'The Patristic Era: Early Christian Attitudes toward the Disfigured Outcast', in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, ed. by Brian Brock and John Swinton (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 24-64 (p. 34).
[176] 'For we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it, but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.'
[177] Basil the Great, *On Detachment from Worldly Goods and Concerning the Conflagration which Occurred in the Environs of the Church*; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 9: Ascetical Works*, transl. by Sister M. Monica Wagner (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp. 495-496.

proper greatness, following this the state of the body withers.'[178] If the body is damaged, then both body and soul are damaged, but if the soul is healthy, then health is transferred to the body as well.

Additionally, the virtue most closely connected with the body is temperance, continence, self-control, or, in Greek, *egkrateia*. Temperance, according to the Cappadocian Fathers, is considered the most important virtue of spiritual life, as, through it, the acquisition of all the other virtues is determined. Also, with temperance, the control of the body is achieved through the domination of one's passionate desires and the abstinence from the pleasures connected with them.[179] Even more, albeit more related to the body, temperance is highly associated with the soul as well, since it is 'the denial of the body and confession to God' yet it must be regarded in everything that the soul wrongly lusts 'not being satisfied with the bare necessities for it.'[180] Temperance does not aim at the elimination of desires, but at their liberation from their dependence on the flesh and their redirection towards God and His likeness; this is why it is so closely associated with deification.

John Chrysostom, one of the three hierarchs of the Orthodox Church,[181] was the most gifted preacher of his time and is considered the best theologian and rhetor of the Orthodox tradition.[182] Faced with all the serious theological, and not only, issues of the time, he could not fail to deal with the subject under consideration, the human flesh. Speaking of the totality of the body, he expressed the view that, just as in social life the 'I' finds its true self and identity in the 'you', so the salvation of each body part concerns the whole human body and the individual benefit of each body member coincides with the common benefit.[183]

Chrysostom repeatedly defended the body, drawing from the Pauline distinction between body and flesh. 'We do not want to eliminate the flesh, but decay; not the body, but death,' he stresses, while he adds,

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[178] Basil the Great, *Homily on the Words 'Be Attentive to Yourself'*, 1; *On the Human Condition*, transl. by Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), p. 97.
[179] Larchet, p. 58.
[180] Basil the Great, *The Letters*, 366; *The Letters: In Four Volumes, Vol. 4*, transl. by Roy J. Defarrari (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1934), pp. 351-353. Of course, following Paul's theology, what Basil by 'denial of the body' means, is not the rejection of the body in its true nature, but of carnal desires.
[181] The other two are St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Basil the Great.
[182] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 306.
[183] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Timothy*, 7; *Homilies on 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, transl. by James Tweed (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011), p. 228.

> The body is God's work, but corrosion and death were introduced by sin. So, I want to get rid of what is stranger to me, not what is mine; and it is not the body that is foreign, but the wear and tear… Do not mention, therefore, pain, sickness, sweat, impurity, and all the other things that the accusers of the body mention; because these are not features of the nature of the body, but of the sin that came later. But if you want to understand the body's virtue, look carefully at the shape and capacities of its members, as well as, the balance between them and you will realize that the relationship of these members is greater than that of any city with fair laws and wise citizens… The fact that not only no harm but, on the contrary, a great gain to the human race, was done by it, is evident from the following. For all the saints who lived with this body showed angelic behavior and no obstacles were placed by the body, on their way to virtue.[184]

In a like manner, in his *Homily on the Resurrection of the Dead*, he articulates,

> In his expression, 'the flesh lusts against the Spirit', he (Paul) means two mental states. For these are opposed to each other, namely virtue and vice, not the soul and the body. Were the two latter so opposed they would be destructive of one another, as fire of water, and darkness of light. But if the soul cares for the body, and takes great forethought on its account, and suffers a thousand things in order not to leave it, and resists being separated from it, and if the body too ministers to the soul, and conveys to it much knowledge, and is adapted to its operations, how can they be contrary, and conflicting with each other? For my part, I perceive by their acts that they are not only not contrary but closely accordant and attached one to another. It is not therefore of these that he speaks as opposed to each other, but he refers to the contest of bad and good principles.[185]

Chrysostom, again remembering Paul's words, shows his sympathy for the body, asserting that, although the soul is superior, the body is not evil. Likening it to a harp and a ship and the soul to the harper and the pilot respectively, he posits that the soul guides the body, which bears no responsibility for its deviations, as well as that the

[184] John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Resurrection of the Dead*, 2 (translated by the author).
[185] John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians*, 5; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 13* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), pp. 81-82.

responsibilities fall exclusively on the one that is in charge, the soul. John comes to this conclusion after mentioning that Paul did not indict the flesh, but just demonstrated the superiority of the soul, for it has taken over all the ship government and the harp playing.[186] Finally, Chrysostom, due to the fact that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, advises us to be careful, not letting them become, as he characteristically expresses, 'a den of brigands',[187] while he teaches,

> What we have is not ours; for we also have money, but others have transferred it to us; we rent land, but others have given it to us. So, God gave it (the body) to you not to produce thorns, but to change the seeds into something useful; not to show arrogance and deceit, but to make them grow in humility, glory, and love; and He gave you your eyes not to give lecher looks, but to beautify them with prudence; and He gave you hands not to strike, but to spread them mercifully.[188]

John, therefore, besides exhorting people to make good use of their bodies, not only defends them and distinguishes them from fleshly desires, but also reinforces the view that evil comes foremost from within and speaks of the connection, cooperation, and interdependence of body and soul.

This attitude of John Chrysostom towards the body and the flesh was adopted by the majority of the Eastern Orthodox tradition throughout the centuries. As Sergei Bulgakov put it, we ought to 'kill the flesh, so as to acquire the body,'[189] while Harakas, affirming John's teaching, connected the works of the flesh with free will:

> From the perspective of the Church, its Holy Tradition, and its reading of the Scriptures, the works of the flesh are not part of our human nature, as God created it and wants it to be. They are the results of wrong choices on our part. It is true that repeated choices allowing us to succumb to the life of the flesh can become ingrained and sometimes even vicious habits. These habits can control us to the point that we feel our behaviors are

[186] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 13; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 11* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 769.
[187] Chrysostom, *Hannah*, 3.4; Hill transl., p. 105.
[188] John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 118.1 (translated by the author).
[189] In Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, 'Body and Matter in Spiritual Life', in *Sacrament and Image: Essays in the Christian Understanding of Man*, ed. by A. M. Allchin (London: The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1967), pp. 33-41 (p. 41).

somehow natural to us. However, they are really the most unnatural behaviors for people created in the image and likeness of God.[190]

As Harakas, referring to 'wrong choices' manifests, fleshly desires, and passions in general, are highly associated with weaked *autexousion*, the bad use of the free will, which takes place internally.

One millennium after the time of Chrysostom, the most important later Orthodox Father and Archbishop, Gregory Palamas, agreeing with John, articulated that not the body, but the mind is evil when it focuses only on carnal thoughts. For Gregory, when Paul calls the body 'death', he is not attacking the nature of the human flesh, but the sinful desire, which entered human life because of the introduction of the sin. In the same context, he adds that, because the human soul is multifaceted, it uses the body, and more specifically the heart, as its instrument, in which all the thoughts of soul and mind exist, whilst the incorporeal human soul exists inside the body, not oppressed and imprisoned by it, but animating it. The body, therefore, takes life from the soul and is guided by it.[191]

In addition, as Palamas saw, the whole human composite should be deified and participate in the grace of the incarnate God, affirming the Orthodox doctrine of total redemption. Indeed, a crucial element of Palamas' Christology is his insistence on the body as a recipient of glory. As Incarnation confirms the goodness of humans, so it also grounds the divinization of the body because, in the Kingdom of God, not only the soul but also the body will shine, while, just as Jesus was physically and spiritually transfigured on Mount Tabor, due to the 'undivided hypostasis',[192] so the righteous, in their totality, body and soul, receive the divine grace. After all, there is not a locally defined place where the soul resides, but it engulfs the whole body, animating it.[193] A decade later, the Patriarch of Constantinople Gennadius Scholarius

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[190] Stanley S. Harakas, *Of life and Salvation: Reflections on Living the Christian Life* (Portland, Oregon: Light and Life Pub, 1996), p. 105.

[191] Gregory Palamas, *In Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude*, 3.1-3; *The Triads*, transl. by Nicholas Gendle (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 36-37.

[192] In Palamas' view, the light of Tabor, seen by the disciples of Jesus, is visible to the human bodily eye, a view that contradicts the Catholic doctrines of Divine Simplicity and the immediacy of the beatific vision. However, it was accepted by the Orthodox Church, as an Eastern response to 'Western rationalism' and an attempt to prove that the glorified body participates, along with the soul, in the vision of God. Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (St. Louis, Missouri: Pope John Center, 1985), p. 124.

[193] Gregory Palamas, *150 Physical, Theological, Moral, and Practical Chapters*, 61; *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. and transl. by Robert E. Sinkewicz (Toronto; Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988), p. 155.

will add that the human soul, in its entirety, resides in the body, exists within each of its molecules, and shares the same nature with it.[194]

Based on all these anti-dualistic teachings, it becomes clear that the Eastern Orthodox tradition very early recognised the human person as an undivided psychosomatic unity and appreciated the harmony of soul and body, emphasising that there can be no human nature without the simultaneous presence of both. The flesh, on the one hand, is de-sanctified, since it is not an object of worship and, on the other, it is sanctified, for not only is it not disregarded or condemned, but on the contrary, it is led to perfection in Christ. The appropriate stance towards our body stands somewhere in the middle, as the Church exhorts humans to act in moderation between humiliation with extreme ascetic tendencies and exaggerated physical care.[195] Humans constitute a microcosm of the world and this is why our attitude toward our bodies reveals our attitude toward the rest of creation. This leads to the conclusion that whether people downgrade their bodies, they become indifferent towards the world, whereas if they love it excessively, they end up worshipping material goods, falling into paganism, and committing idolatry.[196]

For Orthodox theology, the very fact that the soul is closely connected with the body, since it exists everywhere in it and gives life to it, also manifests our close connection with God and proves that humanity was made in God's image. Although there is a clear distinction between soul and body, there also is a mutual dependency, making it impossible for both to exist independently of each other and, even at death, when the soul is violently separated from the harmony and affinity of this natural bond, this separation occurs by God's will. However, the eschatological destination of the body is to be deified and resurrected, passing into eternity, alongside the soul.[197] In the words of John Breck,

> A person does not 'have' a soul, in the sense that the soul is an independent entity that enters or is 'infused' into a physical body at some specific moment: at conception, at implantation, at birth or whenever. The human person, rather, is characterized as a 'living being' (Gen 2:7), which means a 'living soul.' Soul is the transcendent aspect of our being.

[194] Gennadius Scholarius, *Homily on the Sacramental Body of our Lord Jesus Christ* (translated by the author).
[195] Apostolos Nikolaidis, *Προβληματισμοί Χριστιανικού Ήθους* (*Christian Ethos Concerns*) (Athens: Grigoris, 2002), p. 37.
[196] Nikolaidis, p. 155.
[197] Vlachos, pp. 62-63.

> Although we speak of the 'separation of soul and body' at physical death, the soul is still not to be considered an entity distinct from the body.[198]

Eastern Orthodoxy, therefore, honours the human body and does not abhor it. This is also manifested in the crucial role that the body plays in the paramount element of Orthodox spiritual life, that is, worship,[199] as it participates in it in many ways: through a range of symbolic actions, such as the sign of the Cross and deep bows; through abstinence and fasting; through its involvement in sacraments, especially baptism, Eucharist, and marriage; through its frequent anointment with oil; through the laying-on of hands during ordinations and the Orthodox confession; through the veneration of even the dead body at funerals; and through its involvement not only in liturgy but also in private prayer.[200]

The value of the human body in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is also manifested in the veneration of the deceased bodies of the blessed. Since the body itself is the living Church, in which Christians are called to worship God and this is why the relics, the dead yet glorified bodies of the saints and martyrs, who loved Him so much, are honoured and kept as treasure. These bodies often show no signs of decay, emit a fragrant aroma, and, like the holy icons, bleed myrrh, still participating in the divine energies and even performing healing miracles.[201] As Harakas declares, 'These saints were so sanctified and transfigured by the Holy Spirit dwelling within them that their bodies also bear the marks of holiness and serve as a source of sanctification and healing power for believers even today.'[202] Theologically, the ideal way for Orthodox Christians to approach their flesh is to worship and espouse these holy relics, receiving their grace in their own body and realising their own mortality and mutability. The sacred relics palpably reveal the presence of the saint. When believers are close to these relics, it is like their eyes, ears, mouth, and all their senses, in general, embrace the very living body that, although physically dead, is still full of life. With respect and love, they pray to the sleeping saint, as if he or she were present

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[198] John Breck, *God With Us: Critical Issues in Christian Life and Faith* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 51.
[199] In the words of the Orthodox theologian George Florovsky, 'Christianity is a liturgical religion… Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second.' George Florovsky, '*Sobornost*: The Catholicity of the Church' in *The Church of God: An Anglo-Russian Symposium by Members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius*, ed. by E. L. Mascall (London: SPCK, 1934), pp. 53-74 (p.54).
[200] Kallistos Ware, '"My Helper and My Enemy": The Body in Greek Christianity', in *Religion and the Body*, ed. by Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 90-110 (pp. 101-108).
[201] Cornelia A. Tsakiridou, *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian Image* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 256-257.
[202] Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues*, p. 183.

in front of them.[203] According to Gregory of Nyssa, touching and embracing these holy relics is a gift beyond imagination, as even the dirt on them is dear.[204] Saints, following the Lord's way of life, received the divine grace and became holy in soul and body, a grace that remains in both, even after their separation in death. Ultimately, their life is the greatest proof of the transformation and deification of our own flesh and this is exactly why, in his words, 'we must ascribe honour to the living temples of God, the living tabernacles of God.'[205]

With regard to physical pain, even though the body is highly respected, in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, there are indeed several examples of ascetics who did not wish to be medically relieved of the pain and suffering of their flesh, considering it as a means to spiritual purification and perfection. Contrarily, there are cases of saints who resorted to the use of pharmaceutical or other medical means. Neither choice is reprehensible, for Eastern Orthodox ethics, as it fully respects the personal freedom of every human being to deal with pain and suffering and firmly believes that medical science is a gift from God to humankind.[206] In Engelhardt's phrase, 'Medicine itself is recognized as a blessing to be engaged, so long as it does not distract from the pursuit of salvation.'[207]

However, as already mentioned, suffering and even death were beneficially bestowed, as the often torturous pains in Christian life can be a weapon against pride as well as a challenge we accept from God to prove our faith and trust in Him. With the voluntary endurance of the sufferings of our bodies, we fight for the benefit of our souls. Just as plants have to overcome the difficulties caused by weather changes to bloom and fructify, so believers must endure hardships to reach perfection. This very beneficial and pedagogical dimension of suffering is emphasised by the Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis in his monograph, *The Salvation of Man and the World*. According to Zisis, the fact that the body, in its primordial state, was free from pain and any kind of suffering, contributed to the development of human pride and

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[203] Kapodistrias, p. 44.
[204] Gregory of Nyssa, *In Praise of Blessed Theodore the Great*; Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 238.
[205] John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.15 (translated by the author).
[206] Typical is Chrysostom's admonition to his dear friend, Olympias. See John Chrysostom, *Four Letters to Olympias*, 2.1; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 9* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 405.
[207] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., 'The Orthodox Christian View of Suffering', in *Suffering and Bioethics*, ed. by Ronald M. Green and Nathan J. Palpant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 249-261 (p. 250).

egoism. God, introducing pain, discomfort, sweat, sorrow, and weariness into the body, in order to eliminate these passions, did not, of course, act vindictively and pugnaciously towards humans, but, in contrast, therapeutically. Thereby, God repaired the damage done by pride and the misuse of free will, which, as a result, interrupted human development from image to likeness. Death and decay, therefore, although undeniably evil and tragic consequences of sin, are indeed curative because they function as means by which the eternal abidance of sin within humans is avoided, since God is like the sculptor, who, if he sees one of his statues damaged by a spiteful or jealous person, destroys it and makes it good again from scratch.[208]

As early as the 3rd century AD, Methodius of Olympus articulated that because the devil 'blemished' the divine creation, God established physical death and resurrection, 'in order that the flesh, after sin is withered and dead, may, like a restored temple, be raised up again with the same parts, uninjured and immortal, while sin is utterly and entirely destroyed.'[209] Similarly, Chrysostom, agreeing with Methodius, asserted that, if sinful humans remained deathless, so would sin. Just as rusted metal, when thrown into the crucible, comes out of it clean, so the sinful human body, if first demolished and then resurrected, is reborn, since death, though deriving from sin, ultimately abolishes it.[210] Without bodily death, corruption, and pain, therefore, sin would not have been confronted and people would have remained proud, as the death and decay of their bodies teach them humility and prevent them from considering themselves equal to God. This is why bodily sufferings and pains can be redemptive and constitute vehicles for the path to Orthodox spirituality. 'Let us,' Maximus says, 'love the suffering of the flesh and hate its pleasure,'[211] while, as it was stated by the Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church of 2000, 'The Lord voluntarily accepts suffering so that the human race may be saved: "with his stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:5). This means that God was pleased to make suffering a means of

[208] Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis, *Η Σωτηρία του Ανθρώπου και του Κόσμου* (*The Salvation of Man and the World*) (Thessaloniki: Politeia, 1997), pp. 102-105.
[209] Methodius, 1.5; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 6*, p. 613.
[210] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues*, 11.13; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 9*, p. 605.
[211] Maximus the Confessor, *Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice*, 23; 'Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 2*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 164-284 (p. 170).

salvation and purification, possible for every one who endures it with humbleness and trust in the all-good will of God.'[212]

Despite all these, it is important to note that, for Eastern Orthodoxy, physical pain should not be deliberately pursued, but only willingly endured and that Orthodox Christians should not consider it as an end, but only as a means, acknowledging its contribution to spiritual life.[213] Injuring the body for the sake of the soul 'is not a main line of Orthodox teaching regarding ascetic discipline and its relationship to the body,'[214] since, as Breck saw, Orthodox theology views pain differently from some Western thinkers, who saw suffering as an essential condition or prerequisite for human redemption and salvation.[215] Only by deliberately accepting physical pain, sorrow, and death as God's will and not by self-inflicting them, we can be united with Him and His grace and reach *theosis*. In the words of St. Mark the Ascetic, 'The mercy of God is hidden in sufferings not of our choice; and if we accept such sufferings patiently, they bring us to repentance and deliver us from everlasting punishment.'[216] Thus, although the value of bodily sufferings and asceticism is not overlooked,[217] deliberate painful practices for the sake of the soul are not accepted by the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

The love and mercy of God for the entirety of human life are also gloriously visible in the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, which guarantees the future resurrection of our own flesh and demonstrates the immense importance of the body. From very early on, the Greek Fathers defended the resurrection of the flesh along with the soul, refuting all the notions that denied the material resurrection. As Irenaeus, for instance, saw, the assertion that the temple of God, in which His Spirit and the members of Christ dwell, will not participate in the resurrection is 'the utmost

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[212] Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, *The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox* Church, XI.1 (2000).
[213] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, pp. 620-621.
[214] Stanley S. Harakas, *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 33.
[215] Breck, *The Sacred Gift*, p. 213.
[216] Mark the Ascetic, *On Those Who Think that They Are Made Righteous by Works: 226 Texts*, 139; 'On Those Who Think that They Are Made Righteous by Works, 226 Texts', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. I*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983), pp. 125-146 (p. 136).
[217] In Yannaras words, 'bodily asceticism defines in a tangible and concrete manner the eucharistic character of the Church's ethos, the way in which the eucharist, the holy communion, is extended into everyday life.' Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, transl. by Elizabeth Briere (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), p. 117.

blasphemy.'[218] All those who reject the resurrection of the flesh, 'set aside the power of God, and do not consider what the word declares, when they dwell upon the infirmity of the flesh, but do not take into consideration the power of Him who raises it up from the dead. For if He does not vivify what is mortal, and does not bring back the corruptible to incorruption, He is not a God of power.'[219] Also, for Irenaeus, since the Resurrection of Christ is an example of ours, and since His flesh is similar to human flesh, albeit not exactly the same, as He was sinless, that which will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven is not flesh and bones in their literal sense, as some have argued, but carnal corruption.[220]

The Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor is a foreshadowing of His Resurrection. With His Transfiguration, Jesus also revealed, not the condition of the resurrected body in general, but that in which only the deified and glorified bodies of the virtuous will be. For Orthodox theology, Christ's Transfiguration is highly associated with *theosis*, as it is not only a historic or somatic event but also one that presents a dramatic change in the way in which humanity will encounter God. It marks the absolute revelation of God and reveals our ability to be deified. As the figure and glory of Christ are visible but also surpass human vision, deification constitutes not only a change within but also an apparition that may be described in physical terms.[221] As the Archimandrite of Mount Athos, Vasileios put it,

> At Lord's Transfiguration, His face became radiant, and the uncreated glory of divinity was revealed as the glory of the Lord's body. But the glory of the body is invisible to those 'not capable of bearing the things hidden also from the angels.' For the glory of the body is the glory of uncreated divinity, which has no beginning; for one to be able to see this glory of the body, one must be worthy—through humility and purification to see the mysteries hidden even to angels. Then one would see that the Lord's created body shines with uncreated grace.[222]

[218] Irenaeus, 5.5.2; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, p. 891.
[219] Irenaeus, 5.3.2; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, pp. 888-889.
[220] Irenaeus, 5.14.1-3; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 1*, pp. 908-910.
[221] A. N. Williams, The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 112.
[222] Archimandrite Vasileios, 'Ecology and Monasticism', *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 348-355 (p. 352).

Conclusively, for the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the significance of the human body is a fact of 'knowledge' of God's revelation and of the eschatological destination of humans,[223] while the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the body is beautifully summarised by two noted contemporary theologians, Jean-Claude Larchet and Stanley Harakas. In the words of the former,

> Original, authentic Christianity is, by its nature, the one religion that values the body most of all. This is seen in its doctrine of creation whereby the body as well is deemed to be made in the image of God. Similarly, Christianity's portrayal of future life is one in which the body is also called to participate. Indeed, it is seen in its conception of the human person as composed inextricably of soul and body, and who thus does not simply *have* a body but in part *is* a body, marked by all its spiritual qualities. Without question, such exceptional value and significance accorded the body is linked to the very basis of Christianity – namely the Incarnation. It is a consequence of the fact that the Son of God became man, assuming not simply a human soul but a human body; that in this body he experienced what we experience; that in his person he delivered it from its weaknesses and ills, making it incorruptible granting it eternal life; and that he gave it as food to his disciples and believers, making them partakers of his divinity, and of all the associated blessings.[224]

Similarly, for Harakas, the truths about the human body, which constitute core teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy are the following: 'the body is not alien to God; the body is not in itself a cause of sin; the soul uses the body for good or for evil and may thus be not only a mere tool but a temple as well; the body is a permanent and essential aspect of the whole human nature; as a result it shares in the God-likeness to which human beings are called; and consequently, one has a responsibility to care for its well-being.'[225]

However, despite the holiness of the body, for which so much has been said, the menace of pride and vanity is always looming, while this very holiness is the reason why we should treat our bodies properly. As Cabasilas writes, 'What then could be more sacred than this body to which Christ adheres more closely than by any physical

[223] Christos Yannaras, *Η Μεταφυσική του Σώματος* (*The Metaphysics of the Body*) (Athens: Dodoni, 1971), p. 218.
[224] Larchet, p. 11.
[225] Harakas, *Health and Medicine*, pp. 33-34.

union? Accordingly we shall hold its estate in veneration and preserve it when, conscious of so wondrous a splendour, we at all times hold it before the eyes of the soul.'[226] The whole human being, ergo the human body as well, as a temple of God, belongs to Him and, therefore, no one has the right to treat it at will, while humans are simply the administrators of the body and have the responsibility of its good use, for which they will be accountable to the Possessor. Ultimately, the human body is good, for it comes from the creative energy of the perfect God. Nevertheless, in the state after the Fall, induced by the original sin, the body has undergone ontological alteration and degradation, as its nature became mortal, and this cannot be cured by material and external means, but only by 'metaphysical' and ontological ones. The cause of the original sin was not simply the disobedience to a commandment, but the severance of the relationship between God and humanity, therefore, restoration can only take place through the renewal of this relationship and the enhancement of human nature, through the resemblance to God.[227]

3.2. The Beauty and Beautification of the Body

According to the Platonic dualistic thought, humans should 'ascend from beautiful bodies to beautiful souls,'[228] a notion that highly influenced the first Eastern theologians and philosophers. Already within the early Church, the Greek Fathers faced the 'problem' of beauty and, albeit its existence, especially in human bodies, was unquestionable, the question of the right attitude towards it has been of particular concern to them. On the one hand, the prophet's words, 'he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him' (Is 53:2), were often understood as 'a repudiation of physical beauty in Christ,'[229] but, on the other, the fact that, according to Genesis, humans are made in the image of the perfect God could not be overlooked.

However, for Eastern Orthodoxy, creation is understood not mechanically but aesthetically, or else, not scientifically but artistically, as Lynn White put it.[230] The Orthodox tradition begins in *philokalia* (*φιλοκαλία*), 'the love for beauty', therefore,

[226] Cabasilas, *The Life*, 6.5; deCatanzaro transl., p. 166.
[227] Efthimios, pp. 139-143.
[228] Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics* (London: SCM, 2002), p. 31.
[229] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: The University of Alabama Press, 1975), p. 90.
[230] Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155.3767 (1967), 1206.

without the experience of beauty there can be no Orthodox theology at all.[231] Nevertheless, although the beauty of nature, art, the human body, and creation as a whole has been immensely appreciated, the beauty that Eastern Orthodox theology admires the most is that of God, as He is the only source of real beauty. God is the 'Super-Essential Beautiful' and not only He is beautiful but He is Beauty Itself, whilst everything else is called just 'beautiful', by participation in Him.[232] In Bishop Richard Harries' phrase, 'The Orthodox Church, without losing sight of the moral dimension or the necessity of spiritual discipline, puts before us a vision of the beauty of God, radiant in Christ, shining in the saints and beginning to glimmer in us.'[233]

In the thought of the Eastern Fathers, the beautiful coincides with the good,[234] hence, besides being an ontological concept, beauty also acquired a moral significance, becoming 'an ethical and social construct, with a profundity that it has, perhaps, lacked within other systems where aesthetics tended for the most part to remain an accidental and peripheral category.'[235] Consequently, within the Orthodox tradition, beauty is highly associated with deification, as, according to Gregory the Theologian, for example, it enlightens human intellect, which produces doxology that, in turn, leads to *theosis*.[236] The beauty of all creation is the way God makes Himself known to humans, which makes our communication and relationship with Him possible, while the spiritual and eschatological significance of beauty is magnificently manifested in the works of several contemporary Russian Orthodox theologians. In Bulgakov's view, for instance, God, through our creation in His image, provided us with the gift of aesthetic appreciation, which leads to the 'transfiguration of the world and renders it conformable to its true image,'[237] while, as Paul Evdokimov remarks, a

[231] David B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), p. 30.
[232] Dionysius, *Names*, 4.7; Rolt, *Dionysius*, p. 61.
[233] Richard Harries, *Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding* (London; New York: Mowbray, 1993), p. 7. Of course, these notions are in the realm of kataphatic theology, as, in terms of apophatic Orthodox theology, God is without form, hence, without beauty. Stamoulis, p. 101.
[234] 'The beautiful is identical with the good,' in the words of Maximus the Confessor. Maximus 'Various Texts', p. 280.
[235] John Anthony McGuckin, 'The Beauty of the World and Its Significance in St. Gregory the Theologian', in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 34-45 (p. 36).
[236] McGuckin, p. 40.
[237] Sergei Bulgakov, 'Religion and Art', in *The Church of God: An Anglo-Russian Symposium by Members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius*, ed. by E. L. Mascall (London: SPCK, 1934), pp. 175-191 (p. 176).

spiritual person is not only moral but also beautiful, as he or she radiates divine beauty.[238]

Human beings, made in God's image, are the first to depict the perfect divine beauty. We are beautiful in form exactly because we were created as *apeikonisma* (representation) of archetypal beauty.[239] And although, as mentioned, the image 'faded' due to sin, our physical beauty, which was allotted to us from the beginning, is still apparent and radiant, as our bodies still 'continue to maintain their peculiar bloom and beauty.'[240] Moreover, the beauty of the body is the beauty most associated with redemption and deification, as it assists Christians in their effort to reach God and in their journey toward eternal salvation and fulfilment. In order to reach heavenly contemplation, Christians need elevations that are natural and familiar to them, and the most natural and familiar means of this contemplation could not be anything else than the human body, the one that Christ Himself acquired, and its senses.[241] Through examination and appreciation of the greatness of our perceptible and circumscribed bodies, we can conceive the infinite God, Who is 'above all beauty' (*yperkalon*),[242] while only those with 'trained senses' can see the beauty that will save the world,[243] as the great Russian Orthodox novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky declared.

The very beauty of our bodies is the reason why external beautification is, on the one hand, considered not only futile but even morally reprehensible. After all, wouldn't any attempt to beautify and enhance anything made by the divine energies of the perfect Creator be an affront to Him? On the other hand, for Orthodox ethics, the enhancement and embellishment of creation, under strict conditions and for the sake of divine economy (*oikonomia*),[244] are not necessarily bad, since humans, as Paul wrote, are 'God's coworkers' (1 Cor 3:9), i.e. they cooperate with Him and participate in His creative work. Hence, what is troubling is not the act of physical beautification

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[238] Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, transl. by Fr. Steven Bigham (Pasadena, California: Oakwood Publications, 1970), p. 11.
[239] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 6; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 5*, p. 895.
[240] Chrysostom, *Hannah*, 1.2; Hill transl., p. 69.
[241] L. Michael Harrington, 'Church Walls and Wilderness Boundaries: Defining the Spaces of Sanctuary', in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 235-242 (pp. 238-239).
[242] Basil the Great, *Nine Homilies on Hexaemeron*, 1.11; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 264.
[243] Stamoulis, p. 80.
[244] The Orthodox concept of *oikonomia* is the reasonable and prudent deviation from the strictness of the rules of the Orthodox Church, out of Christian love and recognition of the imperfection of human nature, without violating the fundamental doctrinal boundaries. For more, see John A. Douglas, 'The Orthodox Principle of Economy, and Its Exercise', *Theology*, 24.139 (1932), 39-47.

per se, which, especially in modern society, is considered vital, but people's excessive emphasis on their bodies, accompanied by indifference to their souls, and their obsession with externally beautifying themselves. Fathers of the Eastern Church tried to deter humans from this obession, as the path to deification in Christ passes primarily through spiritual life and inner beauty. Embellishment is not evil in itself, but the apotheosis of external beauty and the scorn of the inner one lead to vanity and pride.[245] After all, Lucifer himself became the "prince of darkness" precisely because of the narcissistic contemplation of his own beauty, which eventually reached the level of self-deification.[246]

For Orthodox theology, therefore, even though beauty is appreciated and is highly associated with *theosis*, bodily beautification often distracts us from this destination. St. Clement of Alexandria, as early as the 2nd century AD, in his hugely influential *Instructor*, was the first to explicitly speak about the true beauty as well as against excessive physical adornment. Recalling Jesus' aforementioned words about the futility of excessive care for food and clothing, Clement characterises practices such as luxurious clothing, hair dyeing, make-up, and love for ornaments and finery as 'wicked arts' and 'deceptions'. For him, the one who is devoted to this idolatrous beauty instead of 'the beautiful itself', which is God, is driven by ignorance and drawn apart from the truth,[247] while, in his words, people

> must accordingly utterly cast off ornaments as girls' gewgaws, rejecting adornment itself entirely. For they ought to be adorned within, and show the inner woman beautiful. For in the soul alone are beauty and deformity shown. Wherefore also only the virtuous man is really beautiful and good. And it is laid down as a dogma, that only the beautiful is good… And the excellence of man is righteousness, and temperance, and manliness, and godliness. The beautiful man is, then, he who is just, temperate, and in a word, good… But the love of ornament, which is far from caring for virtue, but claims the body for itself, when the love of the beautiful has changed to empty show, is to be utterly expelled. For applying things unsuitable to the body, as if they were suitable, begets a practice of lying

[245] Apostolos Nikolaidis, *Από τη Γένεση στη Γενετική* (*From Genesis to Genetics*) (Athens: Grigoris, 2006), p. 148.
[246] Stamoulis, pp. 191-192.
[247] Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 2.11; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 423.

> and a habit of falsehood; and shows not what is decorous, simple, and truly childlike, but what is pompous, luxurious, and effeminate. But these women obscure true beauty, shading it with gold.[248]

Thus, and since, as mentioned, proper beautification leads to *theosis*, humans can resemble True Beauty and be deified not by external and physical adornment, but only 'by well-doing, and by requiring as few things as possible.'[249] Clement insisted that the soul alone should be beautified with the adornment of decency so that the body can be decorated with temperance, while he fiercely attacked both female and male outward embellishment,[250] suggesting frugality instead, as 'that which is superfluous, what they call ornaments and the furniture of the rich, is a burden, not an ornament to the body.'[251] Furthermore, he explicitly rejected the more specific case of face painting, expressing that foreign ornaments defile the original image and likeness of God, and juxtaposing 'the decoration of sobriety'.[252]

Around one century later, Basil warned that bodily embellishment must not prevent believers from reaching salvation, as those who beautify themselves so that they are liked by others suffer from the disease of vanity and the passion of vainglory, wandering away from God. Drawing from the epistle to the Ephesians, he urges women to refrain from beautification, stressing that they 'should not adorn themselves for beauty's sake' but rather should care only about doing good works and being humble.[253] Just as a simple garment is no worse than a luxurious one in protecting from cold weather, we must not completely despise the body, but take care of it only to the extent that it is a helper for spiritual life. The one who spends one's time on the care for his or her bodily beauty instead of caring for the purification of the soul is either sick or unjust and being called 'beautifier' (*kallopistis*) should be considered a disgrace.[254] Finally, likening the body to the musical instrument and the soul to the actual musical art, Basil characteristically asks, 'in what way do those differ, who are solicitous how the body may be as well off as possible, but overlook the soul, which is to make use of it, as utterly worthless, from those who are much concerned about their

[248] Clement of Alexandria, 2.13; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, pp. 430-431.
[249] Clement of Alexandria, 3.1; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, p. 434.
[250] Clement of Alexandria, 3.2-3; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, pp. 436-446.
[251] Clement of Alexandria, 3.7; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, p. 452.
[252] Clement of Alexandria, 3.11; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, p. 462.
[253] Basil the Great, *Herewith Begins the Morals*, 73.4; Wagner transl., p. 190.
[254] Basil the Great, *Address to Young Men on Reading Greek Literature*, 9; Defarrari transl., p. 417.

implements but neglect the art which uses them for its work?' 'Hence', he concludes, 'we must do quite the opposite—chastise the body and hold it in check.'[255]

The majority, however, of Orthodox references related to the issue of beautification are found in the works of Chrysostom, strongly influenced by Clement.[256] Although it has to be mentioned that John's ideas might, especially in modern times, seem outdated or even extreme,

> his interest in the salvation of the soul and his vast Christian background would not allow him to be lenient and conventional. Using the words of the Apostles and those of Jesus Himself, he revealed to the world the destructive effects that excessive care for the body and the entire material world, in general, can bring. His overemphasis, at every given opportunity, on the need for the adornment and the beautification of the soul instead, is for the singular purpose of helping every human being reach salvation in Christ and theosis.[257]

In Chrysostom's view, the human body was made beautiful from the beginning, whilst its ugliness comes solely from human intervention. Thus, bodily beauty has to do with human nature and not with free choice and will; in other words, humans do not become beautiful but are born beautiful and this original beauty of the body is emphatically showcased in his work *On Changing Names*: 'he (man) was very beautiful in his body, and he shone forth like a golden statue.'[258] Nevertheless, Chrysostom distinguishes between physical and spiritual beautification and constantly incites people to engage in the latter and trample on the egoism and arrogance that lead to the former. The only real embellishment, that of the soul, is achieved by persistent efforts and arduous struggles to find God, whereas physical beautification is done in synergy with the source of all evil, the Devil, as it is performed for the

[255] Basil the Great, *Address to Young Men*, 9; Defarrari transl., p. 421. About three centuries later, the canon XVI of the last Ecumenical Council, the Seventh (Second Council of Nicaea), drawing from the teaching of Basil and affirming it, forbade any practice of external embellishment to bishops and clergymen, stating that bodily adornment is associated with vainglory and foreign to the priestly order. Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. I* (London: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 150-151.

[256] For a comprehensive exposition of Chrysostom's views on beauty and beautification, see Angelos Mavropoulos, '"Pleasing to the Eye": The Problem of Physical Beauty and Beautification in the Theology of Chrysostom', *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*, 16.2 (2023), 171-183.

[257] Mavropoulos, 'Pleasing to the Eye', 181.

[258] John Chrysostom, *On Changing Names*, 2.4 (translated by the author).

purpose of adultery and lust.[259] Chrysostom is firmly opposed to excessive physical beautification on the part of women, stressing that it sexually provokes men, leading them to lustful desires, while he suggests almsgiving and the beautification of the soul instead. Turning beautification inwards will benefit both sexes, as women will become virtuous and men will be freed from lust.[260]

For John, the concern for the embellishment of our body and the constant effort to make it more attractive is a disease and an insult to God:

> For why dost thou add thy own embellishments to the work which God made? Is not His workmanship sufficient for thee? or dost thou endeavour to add grace to it, as if forsooth thou wert the better artist? It is not for thyself, but to attract crowds of lovers, that thou thus adornest thy person, and insultest thy Creator. And do not say, 'What can I do? It is no wish of my own, but I must do it for my husband. I cannot win his love except I consent to this?' God made thee beautiful, that He might be admired even in thy beauty, and not that He might be insulted. Do not therefore make Him so ill a return, but requite Him with modesty and chastity. God made thee beautiful, that He might increase the trials of thy modesty. For it is much harder for one that is lovely to be modest, than for one who has no such attractions, for which to be courted.[261]

Trying to make ourselves more beautiful, not only is pointless and unreasonable but also has the opposite results, as it leads to ugliness, for it is impossible to prettify and enhance something that God Himself created. In the same context, John urges virgins not to imitate actions appropriate to prostitutes, since they are often influenced and imitate them, trying to beautify their bodies.[262]

Furthermore, referring to the theatre, he spoke of the beautification of the actress, which takes place exclusively for her appearance on stage and distinguishes it from the beautification of the woman who carries it to her real life, off-stage. In the latter case, she will not be accepted in the Kingdom of Heaven because such embellishments are not befitting there. Chrysostom also asks women whom they prefer to please, God or men, essentially inviting them to choose which beautification

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[259] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 18.1; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 12* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), pp. 177-178.
[260] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 69.3; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 14* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), pp. 501-502.
[261] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Timothy*, 4; *Homilies on 1-2 Timothy*, Tweed transl., p. 37.
[262] Chrysostom, *First Timothy*, 8; *Homilies on 1-2 Timothy*, Tweed transl, pp. 64-65.

they want to follow, the spiritual or the physical one. Men prefer the latter, but God loves the former, through which we will be welcomed to Heavens.[263] Thus, if a woman wants to adorn her face, she should not do so with various pieces of jewellery, but only with prudence and modesty. For John, taking care of one's outward embellishment brings absolutely no benefit, whereas, whether one cultivates his or her spiritual beauty and is 'dressed in virtue' will be praised even after death and their tomb 'will be more notorious (famous) among everyone than the imperial palace itself.'[264]

Drawing from Genesis and the fact that Adam and Eve, after their sin, felt naked and clothed their bodies, Chrysostom states that we must be undemanding and interested only in our bodies' very basic needs, namely food and clothing because, after all, God created us naked. 'You see', he says, 'the very anxiety about beautifying the body betrays its ugliness, luxurious diet makes clear its hunger, and extravagance in clothing shows up its nakedness.'[265] For him, it is great foolishness on the part of humans to adorn their bodies and neglect spiritual beauty, which leads to many evils, such as vanity, pride, egoism, lack of charity, corruption of the soul, and prostitution.[266] In addition, he stresses that we must abstain from luxury, as it is 'against nature' (*παρά φύσιν*),[267] while he specifically advises women to imitate the examples of Sarah and Rebecca, liberating themselves from the 'disease' of beautification, and to luxuriously adorn their souls with 'good works'. What God has created is good and there is no room for interference and corrections, as any such effort can only bring the opposite results. He also invites everyone to imitate the saints, who are clothed in worn garments and dwell in the deserts, preferring the beauty of soul and mind.[268]

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[263] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 28.15-16; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 14*, pp. 501-502.
pp. 933-935
[264] John Chrysostom, *Homily on Pelagia, Virgin and Martyr*, 3; Pauline Allen, Boudewijn Dehandschutter, Johan Leemans, and Wendy Mayer, *'Let Us Die that We may Live': Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria c.350-c.450 AD* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 154.
[265] Chrysostom, *Genesis*, 37.17; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 82: Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, transl. by Robert Charles Hill (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 352-353.
[266] Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 39.11; Hill transl., p. 412.
[267] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*, 27; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 11*, p. 331.
[268] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 57.3; *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Part II: 26-58*, transl. by George Prevost (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011), Chrysostom, pp. 776-778.

Moreover, although it may initially seem that Chrysostom favours men and assigns full responsibility for beautification to women, this perception is inaccurate. In one of his admittedly few references specifically to men and male beautification, he emphasises that whether a man desires it, he becomes a) petty, since it is worthless; b) greedy, for its care requires large expenses, therefore large income as well; c) misanthropist, caring about ornaments instead of his hungry neighbour; and d) arrogant, seeking the glory through the trivial. He also criticises some young men who brag about their clothes, ornaments, and hair, which are works of a foreign craftsman.[269]

In a similar manner, John of Damascus included 'every kind of physical luxury and gratification of the whims of the flesh', 'self-adornment', 'cosmetics', and 'painting the face' in the passions of the body, connecting them with avarice, lust, and vanity,[270] St. Theodore the Great Ascetic expressed that one should only care for one's body's basic needs, for 'intelligible beauty surpasses sensible beauty,'[271] and Gregory Palamas spoke of the 'disease of self-adornment'[272] and the beauty of physical objects, which 'leads us to the degrading passions.'[273]

As the beauty of the body is associated with salvation and redemption, somehow analogously, the beautiful ecclesiastical images are not only external representations of the divine but the participation of humans in the divine life and 'a testimony of the concrete, practical knowledge of the sanctification of the human body.'[274] Holy icons are not mere decorations in the modern, artistic sense but they also constitute the words and the visible evidence of the Incarnation of God, transmitting the Orthodox tradition to Christians, and helping them in their quest for enlightenment.[275] Indeed, the fact that the Word became flesh and deified the flesh is associated with Eastern Orthodox tradition's attitude on the issue of iconoclasm, and art in general, and this

[269] Chrysostom, *Matthew*, 49.7; Prevost transl., pp. 674-675.
[270] John of Damascus, *On the Virtues and the Vices*; 'On the Virtues and the Vices', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 2*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 334-342 (p. 335).
[271] Theodoros the Great Ascetic, *Theoretikon*; 'Theoretikon', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 2*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 38-47 (p. 39).
[272] Gregory Palamas, *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, 41; 'To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 4*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 293-322 (p. 301).
[273] Palamas, *Xenia*, 42; Palmer transl., p. 310.
[274] Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, transl. by G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), p. 36.
[275] Anne Karahan, 'Beauty in the Eyes of God: Byzantine Aesthetics and Basil of Caesarea', *Byzantion*, 82.1 (2012), 165.

correlation between bodies and images constitutes stable Orthodox teaching, since they can both be seen as symbols for contemplation. In the words of one of the most zealous supporters of icons against iconoclasts, St. Theodore the Studite, 'One of the Trinity has entered human nature, becoming like us. For this reason, he is portrayed in icons, and the unseen is seen. The unseen can be seen in the icons of the church because the act of Incarnation has already bound together the unseen and the seen in the cosmos at large.'[276] Thus, both icons and bodies are not mere means, but symbols that connect the seen with the unseen, the material with the spiritual, and the created with the uncreated. Still, for Theodore, who followed the aforementioned apophatic approach, the presence of Christ within a spatial and temporal body does not confine Him or reveal His true essence, for divinity itself is still not defined. 'Understand', he urges, 'that He (Christ) remains uncircumscribed in being circumscribed.'[277]

Thus, in the teaching 'the Word became flesh and deified the flesh', flesh does not signify the body alone, but all physical nature and this is crucial for the comprehension of the Orthodox association between bodies and icons. Through the Incarnation, not the human body alone, but all matter became the Body of Christ, therefore, besides the spiritual creation, the whole material creation too can be eschatologically redeemed, transfigured, and glorified. As Apostle Paul said, 'the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). Based on this teaching, for Ware, since God has deified matter and flesh became the 'vehicle of the soul', then so, although in a different manner, can wood and paint. In his words, 'Orthodoxy's idea of cosmic redemption is based, like the Orthodox doctrine of the human body and the Orthodox doctrine of icons, upon a right understanding of the Incarnation: Christ took flesh— something from the material order— and so has made possible the redemption and metamorphosis of all creation—not merely the immaterial, but the physical.'[278]

Regarding the beauty of art and human artistic creativity, the respect towards it by the Eastern Orthodox Church has always been immense. This is manifested in the central role of art for Orthodox liturgical and spiritual life and in the rich Orthodox

[276] Theodore the Studite, *Antirrhetikoi*, 1.2-3; L. Michael Harrington, 'Church Walls and Wilderness Boundaries: Defining the Spaces of Sanctuary', in Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation, ed. by John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 235-242 (p. 239).
[277] Theodore, *Antirrhetikoi*, 1.2-3; Harrington, p. 239.
[278] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church: New Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 239-240.

tradition not only of iconography but of other forms of art as well, such as music and architecture.[279] Human beings are made creative, as we freely participate in God's creative work, a fact that is connected to our personhood, while 'The term "creativity" is significantly applied to Art *par excellence*.'[280] However, not all art is to be respected, as not all artistic creativity is virtuous. As Zizioulas writes, art, being a characteristic of human personhood, can often project a 'demonic' personhood, 'as we can observe in many forms of modern art which, not insignificantly, have emerged at a time when personhood and freedom have become predominant notions in our culture.'[281] Thus, human artistic creativity can be either moral, expressing genuine beauty, or immoral and be associated with immorality and blasphemy, than which, in the phrase of Chrysostom, 'there is nothing worse.'[282]

From all the above, it became clear that the excessive pursuit of external attractiveness is considered not only futile but can also be considered morally reprehensible by Eastern Orthodox ethics, as only God is the true archetype of beauty. He is the only source of beauty, which we can contemplate 'with the opened eyes of our transfigured bodies.'[283] Nevertheless, the introduction of sin and the Fall brought about humanity's disconnection from the source of beauty as well as the transformation of human nature, which became ugly. As Stamoulis articulates, 'the fall of our first parents did not lead to the loss of the image of God; it led to the removal of the beauty of that image. That is to say, our first parents, and with them the whole of the human race, lost the radiance of what was in accordance with the image, its beauty, and were led to the "non-beauty" of the Fall.'[284] The return to the beautiful, original state of our bodies is what we have to aim at, as humans must be liberated from the obsession with earthly fragile beauty and use it as an opportunity for reconnection with supreme beauty. This can only be achieved through the

[279] In the words of St. Sophrony of Essex, 'I said many times that it is good for one to have an artistic personality so that our life is always inspired: we can suffer, maybe we lack all strength, but inspiration, like some kind of river of energy, constantly flows. And then our life knows no laziness [acedia]. So you should all be artists in your [spiritual] life and keep your inspiration, because there is nothing in all creation greater than Christ and His teaching! Everything else that humanity is proud of fades in comparison with what Christ gave us.' See St. Sophrony of Essex, 'We should all be Artists in our Life' (https://otelders.org/theology-and-spirituality/artists-life-fr-sophrony/).
[280] J. D. Zizioulas, 'Human Capacity and Human Incapacity: A Theological Exploration of Personhood', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28.5 (1975), 412.
[281] Zizioulas, 431.
[282] Chrysostomos, *Statues*, 1.29; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 9*, p. 56.
[283] Evdokimov, p. 21.
[284] Stamoulis, p. 102.

rejection of vanity and pride along with devotion to God and prayer.[285] Human beings ought to remain focused, with their eyes and hearts open to God, since deification and salvation are directly related to the spiritual knowledge of divine beauty. If we experience and perceive this very beauty spiritually, we will understand how insignificant all the earthly and perishable things that we foolishly admire and love really are.[286]

This supreme, spiritual, divine beauty was manifested in Transfiguration, during which Jesus revealed the true splendour of the body. The enlightened body of Christ also illuminated the garments that clothed Him, but not equally, as His face and body were self-illuminated, while those were not. This is exactly how we are called through our illumination, to carry the 'garments of unsinfulness.' While adorned in these garments, Adam was much more attractive than those who wear clothes embellished with golden and lavish stones, whereas when he rejected them he felt naked and ashamed. This divine attire God invites us all to wear, with which we will never feel naked again. Beauty is experienced in simplicity, while modesty leads to the unification of human nature, body and soul. In addition, the simplicity of life liberates the heart and leaves room for those things that are actually valuable, whilst prudence and humility help us maintain our spiritual unity and freedom.[287]

While, therefore, physical beautification is not evil, extreme and obsessive striving for outward embellishment is repudiated. A balance between the two is what Orthodox Christians should maintain, as Agapios the Hiermonk and Nicodemos of Mount Athos, in their influential work, *Pedalion* (*The Rudder*) characteristically articulated. Interpreting the 96th canon of the Quinisext Council of Constantinople, which punished with excommunication those baptised who kept being obsessed with the embellishment of their bodies, instead of laying aside 'the deceit and vanity of material things,'[288] they expressed that both men and women must imitate the chaste and pure life of Christ, not adorning their bodies excessively. Since the body is perishable and the soul imperishable, adorning the matter is futile and deceptive, and

[285] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, p. 182.
[286] Basil the Great, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 14.5; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 46: Exegetic Homilies*, transl. by Sister Agnes Clare Way (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), pp. 220-222.
[287] Zisis, p. 139.
[288] Agapios the Hiermonk and Saint Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *The Rudder (Pedalion) of the Metaphorical Ship of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Orthodox Christians*, transl. and ed. by Ralph J. Masterjohn (West Brookfield, Massachusetts: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 2005), pp. 775-776.

humans should prefer the embellishment of the inner self. However, Agapios and Nicodemos add that, just as unreasonable beautification is evil, it is also bad for one to refrain from reasonable beautification practices, such as cutting one's hair, 'for the sake of beautification and good looks.'[289] Thus, the human body must be kept beautiful, but always with moderation and prudence and only after priority has been given to the beauty of the soul.

The only real beauty is the divine, the one that springs from the grace of God; and as God is spirit, His beauty is not physical but spiritual. Thus, only the blessed and the pure in spirit and heart can see this divine beauty, know it, and be enlightened by it. Only through communication and a loving relationship with God can human beings rediscover their true, supreme beauty, the one that the Orthodox Fathers call 'archetypal', and renew their whole existence.[290] The journey to both sin and glory, perfection and perishability, beauty and ugliness, starts from the inside out, from the spirit. After all, it was the deceived souls of our first parents and not their bodies that made them ignore God's command and desire to be equal to Him.

Regarding this point, one particularly interesting study by the Orthodox theologian and Professor of Pastoral Psychology, Ioannis Kornarakis, connects the sin of Adam and Eve and the narcissistic idealisation of their self-image with the mental disorder of neurosis. In his work, *Neurosis as the 'Adamic Complex'*, Kornarakis argues that Divine Grace is not only the sole solution for this problem and the restoration of mental health, but also, 'beyond that, the only instrument for the reformation of the adamic image to its ancient beauty and the realisation of the heavenly purpose of God's likeness.'[291] These dimensions can be applied to modern ethics by addressing the intertemporal issues of narcissism and self-obsession, emphasising the importance of mental health as well as spiritual and ethical growth.

Ultimately, just as the sinful soul affects and infects the body, so the pure and beautiful soul cleanses and beautifies the flesh. On the route to life or death, the soul

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[289] Agapios and Nicodemos, p. 777.

[290] Vasileios Tsigkos, *Ο Ανακαινισμός του Ανθρώπου κατά τη Δογματική Διδασκαλία του Αγίου Συμεών του Νέου Θεολόγου* (*The Renovation of Man according to the Dogmatic Teaching of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2009), p. 89.

[291] Ioannis Kornarakis, *Η Νεύρωση ως «Αδαμικό Πλέγμα», Έκδοση Β' (Neurosis as the 'Adamic Complex', Second Edition)* (Athens: Armos Publications, 2009), p. 145. Similarly, he associates neurosis with the excessive and prideful value that Nebuchadnezzar II unconsciously placed on his image in Dan 2:31-45. See Ioannis Kornarakis, «Η Εικόνα του Νευρωτικού Φαινομένου στο Βιβλίο του Δανιήλ», στο *Διακονία, Αφιέρωμα στη μνήμη Βασιλείου Στόγιαννου* ('The Image of Neurosis in the Book of Daniel', in *Diakonia, Volume in Honor of Vasileios Stoyannos*) (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1988), 507-527.

precedes. This is why, although, for Eastern Orthodoxy, bodily beautification is not necessarily bad, a pleasing-to-the-eye human being has no moral value at all without first adorning and beautifying his or her soul.

3.3. The Modification of the Body

Examining the Eastern Orthodox positions on the human body and its beautification, it became clear that the main purpose of human life is *theosis*, our participation in the divine grace, and that the principal condition for this participation of soul and body is that we 'put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light' (Rom 13:12). The body, therefore, created by God as the temple of the Holy Spirit, must be pure and holy for the whole human, as an indivisible psychosomatic entity, to reach deification. Humans were created very good, beautiful in nature, and in the image of God, a fact that, for several Eastern Fathers, renders any bodily intervention blasphemous. Moreover, the fact that not only the soul but also the body will be resurrected further heightens its moral significance, while nothing, not even our body, is our property, but God's, a fact that does not allow us to treat it at will let alone distort it. But what do all these practically mean with regard to body modification? Can a tattooed and/or pierced both body be holy and participate in our fulfilment in Christ or is any kind of modification considered a sin and prevents humans from their eschatological destination? Are body decorations and modifications acceptable to God? With the above-mentioned teachings in mind, one could argue that any attempt to modify the body is considered theologically unacceptable by Orthodox ethics. But is it really so?

In the Bible, as already mentioned, there are several commands for the avoidance of such practices and one of the most significant of them is the replacement of circumcision with baptism, which reveals the transformative energy of Christ, and through which, 'the baptized one… becomes of one body with Him.'[292] Chrysostom, interpreting these scriptural teachings, emphasised that circumcision is no longer done with a knife, but through Christ and is not performed by the human hand, but by the Holy Spirit Itself, while, through baptism, not only one body part, but the whole body

[292] Justin Popovic, *The Orthodox Church and Ecumenism*, transl. by Benjamin Emmanuel Stanley (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 2000), p. 67.

is circumcised and what is cut off is not just a piece of flesh, but all sin.[293] The human body is spiritually reborn and sanctified, in order to be eventually resurrected after its death, therefore, the sacrament of baptism is deeply eschatological, as 'if one is baptised, one has to believe in the resurrection, and *vice versa*.'[294] Nevertheless, the body, even after baptism, still remains perishable, which makes the need for continual improvement imperative. As Nicodemos said, those Christians who abide by this law for the new life in Christ and abhor the 'old and ungodly' circumcision desire to enjoy peace with God for they have been freed from sin.[295]

However, the type of body modification that the Eastern Christian literature has dealt with and castigated the most is deliberate self-mutilation, in which a body part or organ is cut off or a bodily function is destroyed. The case of mutilation that particularly concerned early Church Fathers and thinkers is that of self-castration, since, as mentioned above, some early Christian thinkers held that the love of God requires severance from any bond with our body. Nevertheless, the practice was soon condemned as anti-Christian and not compatible with the actual will of God, in both the West and the East, by the very first canon of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. The Council also stated that if one has undergone amputation for medical purposes or has been mutilated by 'barbarians' in battle or by one's master, they are allowed to be a member of the clergy, whereas if one, while in good health, gets castrated or mutilated voluntarily, he must be expelled from it.[296]

In contrast, when the amputation of a body part that threatens one's life with the sole purpose of keeping him or her alive is performed, it is not only morally acceptable but necessary and recommended. In relation to this, Basil the Great claimed that there are two kinds of evil, the evil in nature, that is, sin, and the evil that, although unpleasant, derives from God and is applied for the benefit of humans, classifying self-mutilation and castration into the first category and amputation into

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[293] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians*, 6; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 13*, pp. 507-508. However, Chrysostom's arguments must be understood within the distinct cultural and philosophical milieu of his era, as he operated in a society with different values and understandings of the human body compared to our current era of late modernity. Today, the act of circumcision, and other forms of body modification, often encompass a wide range of voluntary practices rather than being solely religious or cultural obligations. For example, see Leonard Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[294] Chris L. de Wet, 'John Chrysostom's Exegesis on the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15', *Neotestamentica*, 45.1 (2011), 105.

[295] Dimitrios P. Rizos, *Οσίου Πατρός ημών Νικόδημου του Αγιορείτου, Ερμηνεία εις τας ιδ' Επιστολάς του Αποστόλου Παύλου, Τόμος Δεύτερος* (*Holy Father Nicodemos of Mount Athos, Interpretation in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul, Vol. 2*) (Thessaloniki: Kypseli, 1990), pp. 352-353.

[296] Tanner, p. 6.

the second one. For Basil, the practice of removing a limb from the body, albeit painful and undesirable, can often prevent the spread of disease and save the patient who benefits so much that not only pays the doctor for the operation but also considers him or her as their saviour.[297] This is why such medical interventions are strongly approved and even considered obligatory, as, in Basil's words,

> we must take great care to employ this medical art, if it should be necessary… In using the medical art we submit to cutting, burning, and the taking of bitter medicines for the cure of the body… Right reason dictates, therefore, that we demur neither at cutting nor at burning, nor at the pains caused by bitter and disagreeable medicines, nor at abstinence from food, nor at a strict regimen, nor at being forced to refrain from that which is hurtful.[298]

This distinction between the two forms of mutilation is found in several sacred ecclesiastical canons, which condemn practices that are contrary to human nature and approve of those done for the sake of the salvation of life. These canons are the 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th canons of the Holy Apostles,[299] as well as the 8th canon of the Protodeutera Council of Constantinople.[300] According to all these canons, the act of mutilation for non-medical purposes is condemned, as it is an insult against God and a form of self-destruction, for it endangers the health and life of the perpetrator.

More specifically, the aforementioned Apostolic canons distinguished between compulsory amputation and voluntary mutilation and imposed severe sanctions for the latter, both for the laity and, even more so, for the clergy. In addition, despite the fact that the Eastern Christian Church adopted the Jewish principle of the wholeness of the body of the priests, it altered it significantly, as the 77th Apostolic canon allows the ordination of one who is bodily mutilated, as not the defects of the flesh but these of the soul defile the person. On the other hand, in cases of severe disabilities, the ordination is prohibited, not because they defile the morality of man, but due to practical reasons: 'But if a man be deaf or blind,' the 78th canon concludes, 'he may

[297] Basil the Great, *Homily Explaining that God Is Not the Cause of Evil*, 3; Harrison transl., p. 68.
[298] Basil the Great, *The Long Rules*, 55; Wagner transl. pp. 331-334.
[299] It is worth mentioning that these canons were formally ratified by the Quinisext Council, which is not accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, the Apostolic canons are accepted only by the Eastern Orthodox Church. See Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church, From Apostolic Times until the Council of Florence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 64-70.
[300] Also not accepted by Western Christianity.

not be made a bishop, not indeed as if he were thus defiled, but that the affairs of the Church may not be hindered.'[301]

Moreover, the Protodeutera Council of Constantinople of 861 AD, on the same wavelength, declares,

> The divine and sacred Canon of the Apostles judges those who castrate themselves as self-murderers; accordingly, if they are priests, it deposes them from office, and if they are not, it excludes them from advancement to holy orders. Hence, it makes it plain that if one who castrates another man is a murderer, he who castrates himself is certainly a murderer. One might even deem such a person quite guilty of insulting creation itself… For precisely as the first Canon of the Council held in Nicaea does not punish those who have been operated upon for a disease, for having the disease, so neither do we condemn priests who order diseased men to be castrated, nor do we blame laymen either when they perform the operation with their own hands; for we consider this to be a treatment of the disease, but not a malicious design against the creature or an insult to creation.[302]

Chrysostom affirmed these ecclesiastical canons as well as Basil's teachings, inveighing against those who mutilated themselves in the name of God. Drawing from Apostle Paul's aforementioned teachings about the flesh, John repeatedly wonders how these people dare to disrespect God's creation and associates them with the heretics of his time, especially Manichaeans,[303] once again defending the body:

> Where then are those who dare to mutilate themselves; seeing that they draw down the Apostolic curse, and accuse the workmanship of God, and take part with the Manichees? For the latter call the body a treacherous thing, and from the evil principle; and the former by their acts give countenance to these wretched doctrines, cutting off the member as being

[301] Daniel Buda, 'Mission and People with Disabilities: A Few Thoughts and Facts from an Orthodox Perspective', *International Review of Mission*, 108.1 (2019), 103.

[302] George A. Rallis and Mikhail Potlis, *Σύνταγμα των Θείων και Ιερών Κανόνων των τε Αγίων και Πανεύφημων Αποστόλων και των Ιερών Οικουμενικών και Τοπικών Συνόδων και των κατά μέρος Αγίων Πατέρων, Τόμος Τρίτος* (*Constitution of the Divine and Sacred Canons of the Holy and Acclaimed Apostles, and the Holy and Ecumenical and Local Synods, and of the Holy Fathers, Vol. 3*) (Athens: Rigopoulos, 2002), pp. 676-679.

[303] Manichaeism was an influential dualistic religious movement, founded in the 3rd century by the Persian prophet Mani. For more, see Joseph Torchia, 'Manichaeism', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 295-296.

hostile and treacherous. Ought they not much rather to put out the eyes, for it is through the eyes that desire enters the soul?[304]

In contrast, the amputation of a body part that is carried out for the salvation of one's life is not only approved but recommended, while, even more, it is considered noble and admirable, under certain circumstances, in the case of charitable organ or tissue donation. The truth, however, is that when modern science and technology initially rendered the practice possible, many Orthodox Christians held a negative attitude towards it, based on the fact that our bodily members do not belong to us to donate and on the belief that the body should be buried whole so that it will be judged and resurrected whole.[305] However, very soon, the Eastern Orthodox Church and several theologians began speaking of the goodness of organ donation, as an act of love and altruism. The preservation of life, as a gift of God, is the first principle of Orthodox ethics, as it is the primary condition for the development and attainment of every virtue. And since love is the noblest of the virtues, not only the preservation of our individual lives but also the loving effort to preserve the life of our neighbour is not only good but our duty to God, who generously bestowed this gift to every human being. This is why, in the case of organ and tissue donation, every moral obstacle regarding the cutting off of healthy fleshly members is bypassed. As the very important Orthodox ethicist, Georgios Mantzaridis, puts it, 'who would not praise the sensitivity of the person who, out of love, offers his or her eye or kidney so that someone else can see or live? And what could one say if this giver was willing to lay down even his life that his neighbour might live?'[306] Isn't that exactly what Jesus Himself did in the first place, self-sacrificing His earthly, bodily life so that we could live forever? Nevertheless, the primary criterion for approving the practice is that it is done out of a loving disposition and imitation of Christ's self-sacrifice and for no other reason.[307]

For Eastern Orthodox bioethics, therefore, curative bodily interventions are ethically accepted, recommended, and even praised, while non-curative ones are blasphemous, as any attempt to correct divine creation is a mere satisfaction of human

[304] Chrysostom, *Galatians*, 5; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 13*, p. 78.
[305] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, pp. 604-605.
[306] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, p. 607.
[307] For more on Orthodox theology's viewpoint on organ donation, see M. Vantsos and E. Nikolousis, *Η Μεταμόσχευση Ιστού και Οργάνων από Ζώντα Δότη: Ιατρική και Ηθική Θεώρηση* (*Tissue and Organ Transplantation from a Living Donor: Medical and Ethical Approach*) (Thessaloniki: Ostracon Publishing, 2016).

arrogance, does not comply with God's will, is in line with the effort for self-*theosis*, and leads humans to pride and vanity, replicating the original sin.[308] For Orthodox theology, the proper use of the body is limited to maintaining its health, caring for its needs, and always keeping God's commandments.[309] 'Break the bonds of your friendship for the body and give it only what is absolutely necessary,'[310] as St. Thalassios wrote. Interventions on the human body that are performed for necessary therapeutic or restoration purposes are accepted, since human beings, as mentioned, are God's co-workers and co-creators. This means that it is not only our right but also our duty to strive to improve the world in which we live. As Konstantinos Kornarakis saw, participating in God's creative energies, humans experientially know the reason for Creation, which leads them back to the search for God,[311] while, in the words of Anestis Keselopoulos, without this creative human intervention, 'every created entity is doomed to extinction and destruction.'[312] Similarly, as Staniloae put it, the laws of nature 'are not predetermined to yield the most useful results all by themselves, but instead find their wholeness through the interventions of human freedom.'[313] That is why the acts of body modification are not always evil. The main requirement for a modifying bodily intervention to be accepted is that it is not done solely for aesthetic purposes deriving from vain and selfish motives. When the modification is carried out to deal with a physical condition, then the act is approved and not considered blameworthy.

Still, Orthodox bioethics, respecting the connection between physical and psychological health, the immense importance of the latter, as well as the significance

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[308] Anestis G. Keselopoulos, *Εκ του Θανάτου εις την Ζωήν: Θεολογική Προσέγγιση στις Προκλήσεις της Βιοηθικής* (*From Death to Life: A Theological Approach to the Challenges of Bioethics*) (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2003), p. 239.

[309] Vantsos and Nikolousis, pp. 84-85.

[310] Thalassios the Libyan, *On Love, Self-control, and Life in accordance with the Intellect*, 2.9; 'On Love, Self-control, and Life in accordance with the Intellect', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 2*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 307-332 (p. 313).

[311] Konstantinos Kornarakis, 'Η Θεολογική Θεώρηση των Γενετικών Εξετάσεων (Genetic Tests) ως Υπόμνημα Κριτικής Ανθρωπολογίας στη Σύγχρονη Κοινωνία', στο *Κήρυγμα και Ευχαριστία, Χαριστήριος Τόμος προς τιμήν του Παναγιωτάτου Μητροπολίτου Θεσσαλονίκης Ανθίμου - Συλλογικός Τόμος* ('The Theological Consideration of Genetic Tests as a note of Critical Anthropology in Modern Society', in *Sermon and Eucharist: Tribute Volume in honor of His Holiness Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki - Edited Volume*) (Athens: Armos Publications, 2009), pp. 397-427 (p. 412).

[312] Anestis Keselopoulos, *Θεραπείαν Προσάγοντες: Εισαγωγή στην Ποιμαντική Διακονία στον Χώρο της Υγείας* (*Therapeutic Adherents: Introduction to Pastoral Ministry in the Field of Medicine*) (Athens: Armos Publications, 2011), p. 126.

[313] Dumitru, Staniloae, *The Experience of God, Vol. 2, The World: Creation and Deification*, transl. and ed. by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), p. 49.

of the sociological aspect of human life, could even approve a purely aesthetic intervention, if it is intended to treat a psychological or sociological problem and is not done simply for the sake of beautification. Transferring all the above to modern Medicine, the ethicist, Apostolos Nikolaidis, in his book *From Genesis to Genetics*, expresses the view that the Church could and should understand, for example, the need to restore the amputated breast of a woman, who lost it due to breast cancer.[314] As long as any intervention has therapeutic, restorative, or protective intentions for the physical, mental, or sociological aspect of the individual, without neglecting one's 'normative identity as a human,' there should be no ethical barriers. Thus, male circumcision is allowed, if it aims to 'convey medical benefit to men or their spouses', and plastic surgery is accepted if excision is undertaken because of a tumour or to restore 'human form'. On the contrary, whether each one of these practices is purely aesthetical and rejects the goodness and integrity of the human body, it could never be ethically acceptable by Eastern Orthodox theology.[315]

As in mutilation, so in every form of modification of the body, what is deemed morally reprehensible is not the act itself, but the will of human beings to turn against their health and God's wisdom.[316] Orthodox medical ethics is not utilitarian nor deontological but rather eschatological, while its main purpose is to serve the divine economy, focusing on the individual as a person.[317] Thus, Orthodox moral theology is not interested in listing moral absolutes and inherently evil acts, but each incident must be addressed separately, taking all the facts into account, always, however, with the will of God as the basic criterion. This is what St. Gregory of Sinai meant by emphasising the importance not only of the act itself but of the purpose of every act, as any deed is immoral if it is done without a 'straight and upright heart.'[318] As Harakas put it, 'The commandments of God, in fact, have to do with the purpose,

[314] Nikolaidis, *From Genesis*, p. 147.
[315] H. Tristram Engelhardt Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), p. 272.
[316] Vantsos and Nikolousis, p. 110.
[317] John Breck, 'Bioethical Dilemmas and Orthodoxy', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 42.2 (1998), 174.
[318] Gregory of Sinai, *On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; on Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts*, 15; 'On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; on Thoughts, Passions and Virtues, and also on Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts', in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 4*, ed. by Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, transl. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 212-252 (p. 215).

intent, and overall direction of the Christian life and not with a mere concern for conformity to external standards.'[319] Similarly, in the words of Mantzaridis,

> The Orthodox Church always keeps her moral and social teaching open. Recognising the uniqueness of the individual and the particularity of both people and circumstances, she offers her evangelical message with simplicity and freedom. Without neglecting certainty, she adheres to divine economy. Without relativising the absolute, she accepts and favours topical and temporal pluralism. Thus, on the issue of birth control, for example, the Orthodox Church did not express a monolithic position. This is not due to her indifference to such an important subject, but to respect for human freedom and personal spiritual guidance. That is why a position, such as the one expressed in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*,[320] cannot be aligned with Orthodox teaching, even if it contains an abundance of positive elements.[321]

For Eastern Orthodox theology, therefore, on the one hand, God's commandments must be obeyed, but, on the other, His will cannot be limited to mere moral laws and obligations. Orthodoxy is 'a strange yet realistic blend' between the absolute and the relative and the 'absence of one-sidedness,'[322] while the Eastern Orthodox Church is 'the Church of divine economy', as she does not favour the enslavement of human persons to impersonal rules.[323] As Vigen Guroian put it, '*Oikonomia* preserves the freedom of human personality in a synergystic movement toward *theosis*. Rules and commandments are relative to God's plan of salvation. But that plan is not the possession of any one man. It belongs to the mind of Christ which is the mind of the Church.'[324] This is why acts that are considered inherently immoral, such as suicide, are sometimes not only accepted but even praised, in the form of martyrdom,[325] whilst

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[319] Stanley S. Harakas, 'Eastern Orthodox Perspectives on Natural Law', *The American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 24.1 (1979), 113.
[320] It will be analysed in the next chapter.
[321] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics I*, pp. 212-213.
[322] Peter Bouteneff, *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), pp. 45-46.
[323] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics I*, p. 285.
[324] Vigen Guroian, 'Notes Toward an Eastern Orthodox Ethic', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 9.2 (1981), 235-236.
[325] However, it is crucial to consider the qualitative difference between martyrdom and suicide, as the latter is seen as an act of despair and a rejection of God's gift of life, while the former is considered a profound act of faith and witness to God, willingly accepting death rather than renouncing one's faith. Martyrdom is not about avoiding the humiliation of suffering but about bearing witness to one's unwavering belief in God, even unto death.

deeds that are generally considered good, such as charity, could degrade the human person.[326] Nevertheless, although Orthodox ethics avoids adopting concepts such as 'moral absolutes' and 'inherently evil acts', it is true that certain acts, such as killing the innocent, for example, would be always considered morally wrong. In this case, however, one could reasonably argue that the innocence of the victim is already a circumstance taken into account, so even in this case we cannot speak of the moral absoluteness of the act of murder.

Ultimately, for Eastern Orthodox bioethics, Christians ought to draw authority 'not from the consent of particular individuals nor from conclusions to discursive moral philosophical arguments, but instead from the experienced revelation of the requirements of God.'[327] Orthodox theology, with its eschatological character and perspective, relocates every moral concern 'within the all-encompassing and all-demanding pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven.'[328] Only through this eschatological outlook of life 'are bioethical dilemmas properly resolved and man is not limited to the narrow confines of perishable cosmic materiality.'[329]

3.4. Tattooing and Body Piercing

As for the more specific cases of tattooing and body piercing, they have not been widely addressed in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, as Eastern Fathers and thinkers incorporate them in their general teaching against modification and beautification, without making special reference to them. Nevertheless, some Eastern patristic references specifically to body piercing and tattooing are found. Clement of Alexandria reminds the Christians of his time that the Bible 'prohibits us from doing violence to nature by boring the lobes of the ears' and states that those who engage in the practice 'dishonour by the stains of amatory indulgences what is the true beauty.'[330] In the 4th century AD, St. Epiphanius of Salamis excoriated Montanists[331] for the fact that they engaged in sacrificial feasts, piercing young boys with needles,

[326] Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics II*, p. 100.
[327] Engelhardt, *Foundations*, p. 356.
[328] Engelhardt, *Foundations*, p. 366.
[329] Angelos Mavropoulos, '"Your Faith has Healed You": Christian Orthodox Theology's Ethical Consideration on Placebos', *Theology and Science*, 21.1 (2023), 77.
[330] Clement of Alexandria, 3.11; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, p. 459.
[331] Montanism was an early Christian heresy of the late 2nd century, named by its founder, Montanus. For more, see Ian A. McFarland, 'Montanism', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 321-322.

thereby imitating the suffering of Christ.[332] However, this kind of piercing has little, if any, relevance to the practice as examined in this work. Moreover, in his *Address on Vainglory and How to Raise Children*, Chrysostom addressed the practice, asserting that earrings lead to the sin of vainglory, the fruits of which he calls 'ashes', 'dust', 'fire', and 'smoke'.[333] In his view, if a young girl grows up learning to love earrings, she will end up becoming 'a sore vexation to her bridegroom and a greater burden to him than the tax collectors.'[334] Even more, this habit could be catastrophic for boys and this is why John suggests that the Law should be stricter for them, forbidding any young man to be present in the theatre, so as to 'not suffer utter corruption through his ears and eyes.'[335] Finally, regarding tattooing, St. Theodoret of Cyrus affirmed the aforementioned view that Leviticus forbade tattooing due to the fact that it was associated with paganism and idolatry, reporting that pagans used to pierce their body parts and apply black ink to them to honour their demons.[336]

All in all, judging by the aforementioned views on physical modification in general, it is safe to say that, on the one hand, when the practices are intended to restore or protect the physical, psychological, or sociological well-being of the individual, they are morally accepted. On the other hand, the Orthodox attitude towards both tattoing and piercing would be especially critical in cases they are connected to vanity and pride. As examined, all body modification practices can be applied for mental or sociological reasons, while, in the chapter on tattoo application techniques, it was mentioned that the practice is nowadays also used in Medicine for therapeutic or restorative purposes. In these cases, even in those where the medical tattoo is used purely for restoration reasons, the ethical approach cannot remain unaltered, and Orthodox ethics can accept such applications. As Orthodox ethics is not limited to the sterile acceptance and abidance of laws and rules, what is morally examined and judged is not exclusively the act itself, but also the reasons why as well as the circumstances under which this act is carried out. Thus, whilst an application of

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[332] Epiphanius of Salamis, *Against Heresies: Panarion*, 2.1.48.14-15; Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III: De Fide*, transl. by Frank Williams (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 20-22.
[333] John Chrysostom, *Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children*; M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire: Together with an English Translation of John Chrysostom's Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 90.
[334] Chrysostom, *Vainglory*, p. 673; Laistner, p. 94.
[335] Chrysostom, *Vainglory*, p. 676; Laistner, p. 110.
[336] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Questions in Leviticus*, 28; *The Questions on the Octateuch, Vol. 2*, transl. by Robert C. Hill (Baltimore, Maryland: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), p. 67.

tattooing that is undertaken purely for the sake of external beautification and derives from vanity and pride is considered reprehensible, an application of the exact same practice that aims to cover a scar or skin lesions can be morally acceptable. Even more, such a practice can also be justified when dealing not only with the physical but also with a negative psychological problem that a skin deformity might effectuate, while there should also be no ethical barriers when tattoos or piercings are undertaken to harmonise with one's cultural standards, preserving and protecting his or her sociological welfare.

Examining separately each of the aforementioned reasons why tattooing and piercing are undertaken, based on the Christian teachings on the futility of external embellishment, the preference for the internal one, and the connection between beautification and pride, we can safely conclude that if permanent body modification practices, such as the ones in question, are undertaken solely for their most common purpose, the enhancement of external appearance, they are ethically rejected. Nevertheless, the undeniable importance of bodily beauty, especially in modern society, which the Eastern Orthodox Church recognises and respects, has to be taken into account. Just like, as mentioned, plastic surgery, even if done solely for aesthetic reasons, can be justified, so can purely decorative tattooing and piercing, in cases when they are intended to secure or maintain the psychological or sociological welfare of the individual.

Moreover, as Orthodox ethics pays particular attention to sociological well-being, reasons including social pressure, sociability, and social protest could be justified. For example, for indigenous peoples for whom, as mentioned, tattoos and body piercings have enormous cultural and social significance, such practices could not be considered morally reprehensible. Contrarily, reasons such as curiosity for extreme experiences and attracting attention could not be ethically accepted. Additionally, taking into account the absolute Christian teachings, according to which, we are not the owners of our bodies but only their stewards, one can easily conclude that the mere projection of body ownership and body control is ethically repudiated. Hence, the motivations behind permanent bodily interventions such as tattooing and body piercing, whether rooted in merely attracting attention, seeking extreme experiences, or asserting control and ownership over one's body, could not warrant ethical acceptance, particularly as they are often associated with pride and vanity, and can pose significant risks to bodily health, as evident in practices like 'body play'.

However, regarding body art, things are more complicated. It is a fact that, as analysed, the Eastern Orthodox Church places great value on art, as evidenced by the central role of iconography and the utmost veneration of icons. Would this, however, be enough to justify the use of the flesh as a canvas? At first glance, given the value and integrity of the human body, "no" would seemingly be an easy answer. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Eastern theology sees the body as the vehicle of the soul, not in the dualistic sense of considering it the soul's tool, but instead as being in a union with it, and expressing it materially and visibly. In that sense, if the body is the "harp", the "ship", and the "horse" of the soul, why not its "canvas" as well? This could be elucidated as follows: Just as not every person's soul is virtuous, not every expression of art is worthy of respect. In other words, just as one's inner self can be moral or immoral, one's art can be blasphemous or pious. Whether, therefore, the soul is characterised by virtue, the resulting body art is deemed virtuous and even beneficial for the soul, while, conversely, if the soul is steeped in vice, the art projected on the body will be construed as morally reprehensible. Hence, the moral quality of tattooing and body piercing as body art is contingent upon the moral disposition of the individual.[337] It has been continuously repeated, after all, that in both morality and immorality, the soul takes precedence, while the body, as the embodiment and the reflection of the soul's inclinations, follows.

The ethical implications of incorporating art onto the body are intricately connected with the expression of individuality and personal identity, aspects that also, as mentioned, often drive the decision to apply tattoos and piercings. Regarding identity and individuality, due to the fact that every human is created as the reflection of the image and likeness of God, everyone is a unique and individual person. Hence, one could argue that any bodily intervention undertaken for this reason alone is considered futile, selfish, and even blasphemous towards this divine creative power. In this regard, the intersection between self-identity and creativity can be helpful. In the Orthodox tradition, human co-creativity is respected and encouraged, while it is also connected to personal identity. As Andrew Louth, discussing the aspect of identity in Orthodoxy, remarks, 'central to what it is to be human is the possession and exercise of creativity, which reflects the creativity of God in whose image

[337] It is worth clarifying that this work focuses specifically on the morality of tattoos and piercings for the individuals receiving them and does not address the ethical considerations regarding the tattoo artists and professional piercers. However, it is acknowledged that ethical questions may apply to both parties involved.

humans are made.'[338] Thus, exactly like the expression of artistic creavity, the expression of personal identity and uniqueness can be moral or immoral. Whether identity is understood correctly and it expresses genuine personal creativity and uniqueness, ethical barriers could and should be lifted, while if it comes from pride, self-centredness, and egoism, it is morally reprehensible. In the first case, the rightful reflection of one's personal identity and creativity on his or her body in the form of tattooing or body piercing also acts curatively for the person who expresses it.[339]

Analogously, the same line of thought can be followed for the marking of specific significant life occasions or emotions on the flesh. When tattoing and body piercing are undertaken to commemorate significant life events or to express deep-seated emotions, they can indeed serve as means of externalizing inner experiences. In this sense, such modifications can genuinely reflect the inner emotions of the soul, contributing to personal healing and growth. Contrarily, when driven by superficiality rather than authenticity and is associated with pride, body modification deviates from its potential for meaningful expression and raises ethical concerns. Therefore, the morality or not of the fleshly marking of specific life events, experiences, and emotions through tattooing and body piercing depends on the genuineness of the individual.

Concerning the probably most ethically challenging cause of body modification, its application for spiritual reasons, on the one hand, the value of the human body would not allow it to be regarded as a means to an end, even if that end is the expression of our faith in God. For Orthodox theology, it is not through laceration that we should testify our faith, but through sacramentality, prayer, obedience to God, and moral life. This is further supported by the aforementioned Orthodox rejection of the intentional infliction of pain and self-harm for spiritual reasons. On the other hand, however, and since bodies, as already mentioned, can be symbols that connect the earthly with the divine, this prohibition can be lifted. When the physical intervention is subtle and respectful, is not associated with idolatry, such as the practices that

[338] Andrew Louth, 'Orthodoxy and the Problem of Identity', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 12.2 (2011), 101.

[339] Regarding this intersection of human creativity and self-identity, the perspective of the Orthodox theologian and artist, Davor Džalto, is particularly interesting. In his view, there is a deficiency, within Orthodox theology, of a deeper comprehension of human creativity, 'one that would go beyond aesthetics and that would understand human creativity as something which is related to the very mode of human existence and human personal identity.' Davor Džalto, 'Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Art: An (Un)Natural Alliance?', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 69.1-4 (2017), 340.

Leviticus explicitly prohibits, and stems from sincere faith and devotion to God, the ethical objections are substantially diminished. There can be little, if any, controversy, for example, about the morality of Coptic Christian tattooing, which, as discussed, is performed as a statement of faith and as a reaction to intense social and religious pressure. In this case, the body alteration practice can also act therapeutically for the individual's psychological and sociological health.

Inferentially, when tattooing and body piercing are not associated with pride and aim to benefit the physical, psychological, or sociological well-being of the individual, can they be ethically accepted. If they do not offer any such benefit, they are ethically rejected, a perception that is also based on the aforementioned possible complications of the practices. The Orthodox Church insists on one's obligation to protect one's health and regards as immoral all unnecessary risk-taking actions that may harm it, even equating them with indirect suicide. In their work 'Christianity and Suicide', Øivind Ekeberg and Nils Retterstøl, presenting Eastern Orthodox perspectives on suicide, write, 'Morally speaking, there is also the case of indirect suicide, in which people harm their health through abusive practices such as excessive smoking, excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages, and unnecessary risk-taking. The Orthodox Church teaches that we are obligated to care for our health, so these kinds of practices are looked upon as immoral.'[340] Given, therefore, their potential medical complications, tattooing and piercing are hazardous to one's health, and when they are not necessary, that is, when they are not used beneficially, they are morally problematic.[341] For Orthodoxy, humans ought to respect their bodies and their health and not to abuse them or violate their integrity and wholeness 'without good cause.'[342]

Nevertheless, one should also consider the nuanced differentiation in risk between various piercing and tattooing practices. As already mentioned, several factors, such as the adherence to stringent hygiene protocols, the choice of body location, and the expertise of the practitioner significantly influence the likelihood of undesirable

[340] Øivind Ekeberg and Nils Retterstøl, 'Christianity and Suicide', in *Oxford Textbook of Suicidology and Suicide Prevention*, ed. by Danuta Wasserman and Camilla Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 61-68 (p. 64).

[341] In a recent study, the Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bradshaw, defining as unnatural deeds those that violate 'the integrity of structure and function of the human body,' classified tattoos and piercings among bodily acts that are not contrary to nature as long as they do not harm bodily health. Unfrortunately, however, he failed to address the aforementioned concept of unnecessary risk-taking that might damage it. See David Bradshaw, 'What Does it Mean to be Contrary to Nature?', *Christian Bioethics*, 29.1 (2023), 58-76.

[342] Harakas, *Contemporary Moral Issues*, p. 177.

health outcomes. For instance, piercings conducted on less vulnerable body parts such as the earlobe, coupled with meticulous abidance to relevant legislation and sanitary measures, can significantly mitigate the risk of complications. Conversely, tattoos applied to more sensitive areas, such as the genitals, without appropriate safety measures pose a heightened risk of long-term health consequences. All the above means that, although both activities entail potential health hazards, ethical judgments cannot be uniformly applied, and context-specific considerations must be taken into account to assess the ethical implications of each case.

Furthermore, taking into account all the specific circumstances, if, for instance, the interventions are due to the use of drugs or mental disorders, such as those mentioned above, which would render the person incapable of making rational, conscious decisions, the moral evaluation of the act cannot remain unchanged. Just as, if a person who committed suicide was mentally ill he or she may be forgiven,[343] the same can be applied to tattooing and body piercing. The moral judgement cannot remain unaltered also in cases where the modifier was not adequately informed of its negative complications or has not consented to it and is forced to have it on their body, as is the case in the aforementioned penal tattooing, for example. For an act to be judged as morally acceptable or not, it must stem from informed, conscious, and autonomous reasoning. If it is not done under these circumstances, it cannot be evaluated morally. After all, this is why, as mentioned, humans are the only creatures endowed with reason and free will, so that they will be ultimately judged for their earthly deeds.

Finally, in the chapter on beautification, it was mentioned that the teaching 'the word became flesh and deified the flesh' does not refer to the human body alone, but to all material creation. This means that, through Incarnation, the whole of matter is capable of eschatological redemption, which also constitutes the basis for Orthodoxy's stance towards iconoclasm. Also, it is a fact that many proponents of body modification practices, as mentioned, regard these practices as forms of art and their bodies as 'canvases'. So, since, for Orthodox theology, the beauty of art is highly appreciated - as Orthodox tradition's stance towards icons also affirms - and images acquire value from what they depict and not from their material or paint,[344] what

[343] See Breck, *The Sacred Gift*, pp. 265-275.

[344] As Theodore the Studite expressed, while acknowledging the sacredness of the icons, we venerate them without conflating the physical object with the essence of veneration itself, since 'If we treat the material icon of Christ as divine, we are engaging in polytheism.' Theodore the Studite, *Letter to His*

about religious tattoos? Could a tattoo that 'artistically' depicts a holy person or scene and was done for the confession of faith be considered morally and spiritually equal to the sacred images that the Church hallows? Could Paul's aforementioned exhortation 'honor God with your bodies' be extended to refer to this kind of bodily honour too? Couldn't the 'body/icon analogy' lead to the assumption that the Orthodox understanding of Incarnation and redemption would approve of phrasings like 'sacred tattoos', 'sacred piercings', and so on?

First of all, for the Eastern Orthodox tradition, an icon is considered holy within the context of liturgical time and space, in which the glory of God endows His grace upon the painted image. This is intimately connected to the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, wherein the gifts of bread and wine offered on the altar, symbolising all creation, are presented to God and receive divine sanctification by the Holy Spirit, who transforms them into the body and blood of Christ. Besides that, just as God will not make His dwelling to everyone, but only to those who deserve it, not every icon is worthy of being considered sacred. What we have to keep in mind is that, for one to reach *theosis*, certain presuppositions, or else virtues, are required, which — although not on the same level, since, although all material creation will participate in eschatological redemption, only humans are rational beings to 'desire' a virtuous life — applies to all created beings, including humans as well as icons. Thus, we could not equate the blessed icons that are made for liturgical, sacramental, and worshipping reasons in the Church with the modification practices that one could apply to one's body, regardless of whether they can be ethically accepted or not.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored Orthodoxy's perspective on tattooing and body piercing grounded in its rich moral theology. We began by offering an outline of Orthodox moral theology and proceeded to examine the inherent value and dignity of the human body, considering its relationship with the soul and the ethical implications of personal autonomy. We then delved into the themes of physical beauty and beautification as well as art, recognising their significance in Orthodox thought concerning tattooing and body piercing. Addressing body modification directly, we analysed Orthodox teachings on the ethical boundaries of altering the human body, while, finally, integrating these insights, we conducted a comprehensive examination of Orthodox viewpoints on the case studies in question. This exploration underscored

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Own Father Plato about the Veneration of the Sacred Images; *Writings on Iconoclasm*, transl. by Thomas Cattoi (New York: The Newman Press, 2015), p. 136.

Orthodoxy ethics' holistic approach to the subject, emphasising respect for the body as a sacred gift and the ethical considerations involved in its modification.

CHAPTER 4: PERSPECTIVES FROM CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

In alignment with the previous chapter, the forthcoming one delves into Catholic theological perspectives on the nature, meaning, beauty, beautification, and modification of the human body, concluding with an inferential examination of Catholicism's stance on tattooing and body piercing. However, as with the previous one, this chapter begins with an overview of Catholic moral theology, providing a foundation for a comprehensive analysis.

Our creation in the image of God or, as the Catholic tradition calls it, the *imago Dei* is the first principle of Catholic ethics.[1] God's image refers to human intellect, free will, and co-creativity, while, even more, it means 'from the very beginning, the capacity of having a personal relationship with God.'[2] Besides that, it is also connected with our personal relationship and communion with our neighbour and sociability.[3] Aquinas posits that intellect and will are essential components for reflecting the image of God. While all creatures bear a semblance of the Creator 'as trace', akin to how smoke signifies fire without replicating it, only 'in rational creatures, possessing intellect and will, there is found the representation of the Trinity by way of image.'[4] Hence, within creation, only humans and angels can resemble God. However, as the Son is the only perfect image of the Father,[5] the resemblance of humans and angels is imperfect.[6] Thomas, finally, identifies three consecutive steps on our route from image to likeness:

> Since man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is the most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature. Now the intellectual nature imitates God chiefly in this, that God understands and loves Himself. Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually

[1] Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (St. Louis, Missouri: Pope John Center, 1985), p. 374.
[2] Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 34 (18/05/1986).
[3] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24 (07/12/1965); Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. II* (London: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 1083-1084.
[4] Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 45, a. 7.
[5] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 35, a. 2.
[6] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 93, a. 1.

> knows and loves God, though imperfectly; this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; this image consists in the likeness of glory.[7]

The first degree is found in every human being, the second only amongst the just, while God's likeness, which is the actual purpose of human creation, is achieved in eternal bliss.[8]

Regarding this likeness of God, although the concept of *theosis* is, as analysed, prominent in the East, Western attitudes neglected it and have generally been sceptical, if not negative, towards deification.[9] As Joshua Bloor maintains, divinization has often been 'cast out and labelled as sacrilegious Greek myth,'[10] while Paul Collins, seeking the reasons behind this neglect, explains,

> Within what is understood as mainstream Western theological discourse from the early Middle Ages until the present time, the metaphor of deification has largely been 'off the radar'. It is not so much that deification as a metaphor and concept was deliberately rejected; for many theologians, it was simply not 'recognizable'; it was not a possibility because of the ways in which the divine and the human, the created and uncreated, sin and grace were construed.[11]

However, John Scotus Eriugena was the first Western thinker who embraced the Eastern notion of *theosis*, probably because of his familiarity with the Greek language and his interest in the works of Eastern Church Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor. Dealing with the issue, he expressed his regret for the doctrine's absence from Latin theology, whilst he emphasised that 'the reality of deification, arguing that God not only will be all in all at the end of time but always was and is all in all the foundation and essence of all things.'[12]

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[7] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 93, a. 4.
[8] Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), p. 166.
[9] However, Iacovetti argues that Augustine in particular, *pace* the Orthodox criticism he received later on the subject, never undermined the doctrine of *theosis*. See Christopher Iacovetti, 'Filioque, Theosis, and Ecclesia: Augustine in Dialogue with Modern Orthodox Theology', *Modern Theology*, 31.4 (2018), 70-82.
[10] Joshua D.A. Bloor, 'New Directions in Western Soteriology', *Theology*, 118.3 (2015), 179.
[11] Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 111.
[12] Collins, p. 114.

Aquinas, however, took deification for granted. He connected deification, or else 'man's supreme perfection',[13] with beatitude, the eternal and ultimate happiness that exceeds human capacity and does not consist in bodily delights[14] or any created goods.[15] This happiness is seeing God: 'Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence,' he notes.[16] For the actualisation of this final end, the distinction between potentiality (*potentia*) and act (*actus*) is fundamental for Thomas. In general terms, the former means the aptitude to act and the latter is the fulfilment of this aptitude: 'Some things can exist, though they do not, whereas others do indeed exist. Those which can exist are said to be potentially. Those which already do exist are said to be actually.'[17] Hence, for human beings, the aptitude to act, their *potentia,* is their innate capacity and tendency to be deified, whilst the fulfilment of this aptitude, their *actus*, is deification itself, as 'each thing is perfect in so far as it is actual; since potentiality without act is imperfect.'[18] Human creatures, therefore, become perfect when they move from potentiality to actuality[19] and this movement shows that human nature is not static, but dynamic and progressive. In correspondence with the Orthodox view on the matter, therefore, we could say that, for the 'Angelic Doctor', *potentia* is God's image and *actus* is *theosis*. Aquinas also saw the deifying grace of God as a grace bestowed in the form of the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and love,[20] while he linked human beings' final end, the beatific vision, with human intellect.[21]

In addition, Thomas held that the body and the bodily senses will also participate in the beatific vision[22] and regarded God's likeness as our participation in the divine nature of God,[23] while, likewise, for St. Bonaventure, this 'highest and noblest perfection' cannot be achieved without divine help and requires the presence of both

[13] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 2.
[14] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 6.
[15] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 8.
[16] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8.
[17] Thomas Aquinas, *On the Principles of Nature*, 1.1; Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and the Elements: A Translation and Interpretation of the De Principiis Naturae and the De Mixtione Elementorum of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 1.
[18] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 2.
[19] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 4, a. 1.
[20] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 2.
[21] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 12, aa. 5-6.
[22] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 3
[23] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 112, a. 1.

body and soul, as happened in the Incarnation of Jesus.[24] After the teaching of Aquinas, in Dermot Lane's words, 'heaven is described almost exclusively in terms of the beatific vision.' As Lane explained, however, Pope Benedict XII's definition of the beatific vision, in 1336, which completely excluded the flesh and stated that the immaterial soul of the just can see the divine essence without any material help, is what shaped all the subsequent Catholic eschatological theology.[25]

During the 20th century, and despite the general Catholic neglect and hesitation towards *theosis*, there has been a remarkable shift and appreciation of Roman Catholic theology towards the Eastern doctrine, which 'is no longer a topic limited to Eastern Orthodox thought.'[26] In the words of John Paul II,

> The teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on divinization passed into the tradition of all the Eastern Churches and is part of their common heritage. This can be summarized in the thought already expressed by Saint Irenaeus at the end of the second century: God passed into man so that man might pass over to God. This theology of divinization remains one of the achievements particularly dear to Eastern Christian thought.'[27]

Due to our creation in the image of God, personal dignity must be recognised in every human being without exception.[28] The Catholic theologian who emphasised the subject of human dignity and value the most is undoubtedly the highly influential and prolific Pope John Paul II. In fact, as Charles Curran put it, 'dignity and worth of the person is the basis for the moral theology of John Paul II.'[29] John Paul's emphasis on the value of the human person was largely inspired by the first two chapters of the book of Genesis and mainly the creation in the image of God and human beings' given dominion over the rest of all living things. For him, one's dignity does not

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[24] Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of Arts to Theology*, 20; *St. Bonaventure's on the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, transl. by Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute, 1996), pp. 56- 57.

[25] Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996), p. 139.

[26] Gosta Hallonsten, 'Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest', in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Cranbury, New Jersey: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 281-293 (p. 281).

[27] Pope John Paul II, *Orientale Lumen*, 6 (02/05/1995). For the doctrine of deification in Catholic theology as well as its recent change of attitude towards it, see Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2007).

[28] Andrew Kim, *An Introduction to Catholic Ethics since Vatican II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 145-148.

[29] Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), p. 102.

derive from oneself, but from the grace of God,[30] while this very dignity is the source of human rights, and this is why every human being wholesale is entitled to them.[31] In addition, John Paul recognises the person of the incarnate Christ as the utmost paradigm of human dignity. 'In Christ and through Christ,' he writes, 'man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence.'[32] In Him, we find the basis for each person's dignity, welfare, solidarity, and human rights.[33] Moreover, for the Pope, the Redemption that took place on the Cross restored human dignity,[34] in a way that all three major divine acts, Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption manifest and ground the undeniable dignity of the human person, while, as the Catholic scholar and Archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher, saw, this bestowed dignity also has 'implications for how far we ought dare to go in manipulating our bodily natures.'[35]

In addition to immense value and dignity, the *imago Dei* bestows on human persons their free will, which, as the Second Vatican Council taught, 'is an outsanding manifestation of the divine image in humans.'[36] In the definition of St. Anselm of Canterbury, freedom of choice is the ability to keep rectitude of will for the sake of this rectitude itself.[37] Only in this freedom can we be directed towards goodness, regardless of the fact that we often misuse it, directing ourselves towards evil. Aquinas distinguishes human freedom from that of animals, noting that while animals are primarily driven by their instincts, human freedom originates from intellect and will.[38] This is the freedom that the Thomist, Servais Pinckaers, calls 'freedom for excellence.' 'We are free,' he claims, '*not in spite of, but because of* our natural inclination to truth and beatitude. The attraction of the true and the good are the foundation of our freedom and orientate it. We can therefore call it freedom for

[30] Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 34 (25/03/1995).
[31] Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 11 (01/05/1991). For more on the pope's theology on human rights, see Ethna Regan, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), pp. 38-43.
[32] Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 11 (04/03/1979).
[33] John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 13-17.
[34] John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.
[35] Anthony Fisher, *Catholic Bioethics for a New Millennium* (Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 191.
[36] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 17; Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 1078.
[37] Anselm of Canterbury, *Freedom of Choice*, 3; *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*, transl. by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), p. 197.
[38] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 2.

excellence.'[39] However, contrarily to the freedom for excellence, a different idea, which highly influenced Catholic moral theology for many centuries, was introduced by William of Ockham, according to whom, freedom does not derive from both reason and will, but the will alone is 'the center of the human person and absolute freedom of the will.'[40] This freedom, which neglects human reason and focuses solely on law and obligation, took the name 'freedom of indifference' by Pinckaers because it is exercised independently of anything else than will or freedom itself.[41]

For Catholic theology, however, although human freedom is highly respected, free will and self-determination are not absolute or completely autonomous, as they exist 'within a covenantal relationship with God.'[42] Regarding autonomy, therefore, albeit the Catholic Church fully recognises the right of one to freely make choices for his or her life and self, the absolute autonomy of the self that modern ethics suggests is not accepted, due to the fact that humans made, and still make, bad use of their freedom. As Ashley put it, 'Death has its origin in the sin of free and responsible creatures' who voluntarily chose an 'idolatrous' autonomy over the gift of God.[43] Moreover, since our autonomy is not innate, but given by the Creator, it can only be a limited autonomy, whilst only the perfect God can enjoy perfect and complete autonomy. Complete human autonomy leads to subjectivism and individualism, whereas genuine autonomy is the one that recognises the 'dependence of freedom on truth,'[44] which is God. Through Him, the 'rightful' autonomy of humans is not withdrawn, but is rather re-established, as its dignity is strengthened.[45] The Catholic teaching, therefore, rejects complete autonomy but also complete heteronomy, suggesting *participated theonomy*, in which human reason and will freely engage in God's providence, truth, and wisdom.[46]

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[39] Servais Pinckaers, 'A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts (1986)', in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 185-235 (p. 212).
[40] Thomas Petri, *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, District of Columbia: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), p. 26.
[41] For more on the debate between 'freedom for excellence' and 'freedom of indifference', see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, transl. by Mary Thomas Noble (Edinburgh: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), pp. 327-378.
[42] Petri, p. 168.
[43] Ashley, p. 108.
[44] Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 34 (06/08/1993).
[45] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 41; Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 1095.
[46] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 41.

The most catastrophic and tragic misuse of human free will in history is the original sin, which led to our Fall and introduced sin and death in human life. In Anselm's phrase, 'I wallow in it (sin) of my own free will.'[47] As Aquinas saw, it was the lack of submission of the body to the soul that resulted in death and sickness, as this very submission gives life and integrity to the body,[48] while original sin, in addition to all the aforementioned consequences to the body, also affected the spirit, since, as Augustine put it, humans, instead of having a spiritual body, now possess a carnal soul.[49] The original sin, which is the sin of *superbia* (pride), disturbed the relationship between body and soul, as the two are now in constant battle, for the former is no longer subject to the latter, threatening the person's unity.[50] It also severely damaged and 'stained', but did not totally destroy, the image and likeness of God in the human person[51] as well as human reason.[52] The reason why the *imago Dei* is not completely destroyed is the Incarnation of Jesus, as, even though the sin 'disfigured' image of God in the human beings, 'it is only because the Son assumed his own disfigured image that humankind was once more recreated in his image so as to be conformed, by the indwelling Spirit, into children of the Father.'[53]

Moreover, pride is not only the first sin but also the rebellion against God, the effort to take His place, and the beginning of all evil, whilst its cure is achieved only through the virtue that it directly opposes and destroys; that is, the virtue of humility. Only humility can heal the diseases of egoism and vanity, guiding humans to the right love of themselves, the love that God wants, and the one that does not despise God and neighbour. In the words of Pinckaers, 'Only the truth of humility, working through renunciation to the point of self-contempt and "hating (one's) life" (Lk 14:16)

[47] Anselm, *Prayer to St John the Baptist*, 47; *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, transl. by Sister Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1988), p. 128.
[48] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 97, a. 1; *ST I-II*, q. 85, a. 5; *ST II-II*, q. 164, a. 1.
[49] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, 14.15; *The City of God against the Pagans*, transl. by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 613.
[50] Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, transl. by Michael Waldstein (Boston, Massachusetts: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), p. 244 (General Audience 28, 28/5/1980).
[51] Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 9 (15/08/1988).
[52] Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 51 (14/09/1998).
[53] Thomas G. Weinandy, 'Incarnation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. by Thomas L. Humphries, Lewis Ayres, and Medi Ann Volpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 151-181 (p. 181).

can rid us of egoism and reestablish the purity of natural self-love which flowers in charity.'[54]

Additionally, the Catholic Church accepts the fundamental principle that each human being, created in the image and likeness of God, is an individual person. As such, therefore, every man, 'has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable.'[55] They also derive their origin, sustenance, and 'indestructibility' from natural law, 'which in conferring the one imposes the other.'[56] The personalist theologian, Karol Wojtyla, before becoming Pope, in his book *Love and Responsibility*, magnificently showcased Catholic personalism, linking personhood with human reason and free will:

> There is something more to him (man), a particular richness and perfection in the manner of his being, which can only be brought out by the use of the word 'person.' The most obvious and simplest reason for this is that man has the ability to reason, he is a rational being, which cannot be said of any other entity of the visible world, for in none of them do we find any trace of conceptual thinking.[57]

Wojtyla goes on to say that nobody, not even the Creator Himself, has the right to use a human person as a means to an end. 'On the part of God,' he continues, 'indeed, it is totally out of the question, since, by giving man an intelligent and free nature, He has thereby ordained that each man alone will decide for himself the ends of his activity.'[58]

However, in the 17th century, a different, contradictory tradition, manualism, emerged, dominating Catholic moral theology. Manualists emphasised the physical structures of the body and described human action externally, without reference to the inner self of the person. This means that manualism neglects the interior processes, workings, and movements of the human person, leading to physicalism,[59] whereas,

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[54] Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, transl. by Alasdair MacIntyre (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2003), p. 44.
[55] Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 9 (11/04/1963).
[56] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 28.
[57] Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, transl. by H. T. Willetts (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1991), p.22.
[58] Wojtyla, p. 27.
[59] Curran was amongst the first to use the term 'physicalism', describing it as 'a natural law methodology which tends to identify the moral action with the physical and biological structure of the act.' Charles E. Curran, 'Natural Law and Contemporary Moral Theology', in *Contraception:*

conversely, personalism emphasises not nature but the person, as the principal object of ethical consideration. In the mid-twentieth century, the well-known intense discussions and disputes within Catholicism concerning contraception and the birth control pill fired up the debate between theologians of the two opposite sides.[60] However, it is true that the Catholic Church gradually adopted a more personalist approach,[61] while the interest shifted to the more fundamental topic of the relationship between person and nature.[62]

As to whether the image and likeness of God resides also in the flesh along with the soul, there has been quite a shift among Catholic thinkers, since the aforementioned emphasis on the soul, due to Greek philosophy's influence on the early Church, led to the conclusion that not our bodies but only our souls are created in the image of God.[63] Centuries later, however, Aquinas chose a middle ground, as, for him, even though the image of God is in the human soul, the human body represents God's image of God by way of a trace:

> Although the image of God in man is not to be found in his bodily shape, yet because 'the body of man alone among terrestrial animals is not inclined prone to the ground, but is adapted to look upward to heaven, for this reason we may rightly say that it is made to God's image and likeness, rather than the bodies of other animals'… But this is not to be understood as though the image of God were in man's body; but in the sense that the very shape of the human body represents the image of God in the soul by way of a trace.[64]

As will be analysed in depth subsequently, the idea that the human person is not only a soul, but a unity of both flesh and spirit prevailed in Catholic theology, an idea

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Authority and Dissent, ed. by Charles E. Curran (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), pp. 151-175 (p. 159).

[60] See Petri, pp. 45-91.

[61] It is worth noting that some modern theologians oppose the complete rejection of manuals, favouring a re-evaluation and revival of the manualist approach within Catholic moral theology. For example, see Brian Besong, 'Reappraising the Manual Tradition', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 89.4 (2015), 557-584.

[62] See Petri, pp. 3-5. For example, in the view of Patrick Lee and Robert George, although humans could indeed be called 'animals', since they are physical beings, they are not only that, as a physicalist would claim, but, as persons, they are different 'in kind' than all the other living creatures. Patrick Lee and Robert P. George, *Body-Self Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 50-52.

[63] David F. Kelly, Gerard Magill, and H. ten Have, *Contemporary Catholic Health Care Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. 12. Augustine, for instance, described only the human soul as created in God's image. See Augustine, *The City*, 12.23; Dyson transl., p. 534.

[64] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 93, a. 6.

that changed its perception of *imago Dei* as well. It is now commonly accepted that, although the supremacy of the soul over the body is recognised,[65] the image of God as well as the dignity that derives from it belong to the whole human being and correspond to the whole human personhood and not only to one particular aspect of it. As Anderson put it, 'no fundamental distinction can be made between the human person as an embodied soul and as an ensouled body. Consequently, we conclude that the *imago Dei* is borne as a concrete and particular endowment of each person's existence as embodied personal being.'[66]

Moreover, for Catholic ethics, one can appeal not only to revelation and faith but also to human reason in order to face and solve ethical problems, and the two are complementary, as the former 'reveals to us moral truths that we cannot grasp by the power of reason and also affirms truths that are accessible through natural law.'[67] Hence, natural law is one of the main sources of Catholic moral theology along with the Bible and Catholic Tradition. In contrast Orthodox ethics does not focus on it at all. In Pieper's phrase, 'natural law is the fundamental source of obligation' and 'the ultimate "ought," given and established directly in the nature of created reality, and as such endowed with supreme binding power.'[68] We could not, therefore, fail to analyse the matter in question from the angle of natural law theory, first as deveoped in Catholic theology by Aquinas and then as revived and expanded into the 'new natural law theory' by modern theologians, particularly Germain Grisez and John Finnis.[69]

For Aquinas, this law, written in the hearts of every human being, whether Christian or Gentile (Rom 2:12-16),[70] is 'the work of human intelligence'[71] that

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[65] The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognizes the inner aspect of man as 'that by which he is most especially in God's image' (CCC 363), but also adds that 'The human body shares in the dignity of "the image of God"' (CCC 364). The English translations of the teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the official website of The Holy See (https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

[66] Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1991), pp. 71-72.

[67] Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington, D.C.: USA Catholic University of America Press, 2010), p. 69.

[68] Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, transl. by Daniel F. Coogan (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 182.

[69] See Patrick Lee, 'The New Natural Law Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Ethics*, ed. by Tom Angier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 73-91.

[70] The concept of God writing His law in the human heart exists already in the Old Testament (e.g., Jer 31:33 and Ez 36:26-27). However, the Old Testament refers only to the hearts of the people of God, while Paul introduced the idea of the natural law being innate to every human being, regardless of religious beliefs.

[71] William E. May, 'The Meaning and Nature of the Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas', *The American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 22.1 (1977), 168.

constitutes our participation in God's eternal law[72] and derives from our natural capacity to reasonably know what is and what is not good for us.[73] In addition, according to Aquinas, the Old law generously revealed 'the precepts of the natural law, and added certain precepts of its own.'[74] In the words of Christopher Tollefsen, 'God, recognizing epistemic and motivational deficiencies in human beings *vis-à-vis* the natural law, provides as a supplement to the natural law revelation of the content of the law: that revelation is typically understood to be in the form of commands.'[75] The written law, therefore, was given only because sin wounded the capacity of reason in the human heart and did not change the natural law, as the latter, deriving already 'from the creation of the rational creature,' is invariable.[76]

Aquinas linked all the virtues to natural law, as 'each one's reason naturally dictates to him to act virtuously.'[77] However, according to Pinckaers, what 'established natural law and provided the basis for morality' was the fact that Aquinas reconciled it with the natural inclinations toward basic human goods.[78] For Pinckaers, these inclinations, which are common to every human being and constitute the principles of natural law, include[79] the inclination towards good itself, the inclination to self-preservation, the one to sexual intercourse and procreation, the inclination towards knowing the truth about God, the inclination to social life, and the inclination towards practical reasonableness, or else the cardinal virtue of prudence.[80] The first principle of natural law, however, which Finnis describes as 'formal and in a sense contentless,'[81] and on which all the other principles of natural law are based, is the basic principle of practical reasoning, 'good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.'[82] This is why all the natural inclinations and their goods pertain to

[72] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 91, a. 2.
[73] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 2.
[74] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 98, a. 5. The written law of the Old Testament, therefore, is broader. For example, the fourth commandment, the commandment about the Sabbath does not belong to the natural law. For more on Aquinas' connection between the Old and the natural law, see Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 100.
[75] Christopher Tollefsen, 'Morality and God', *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 5.1 (2014), 56.
[76] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 5.
[77] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 3.
[78] Pinckaers, *Sources*, pp. 404-405.
[79] The choice of the verb 'include' is due to the fact that Aquinas' formulation does not seem to be absolute, leaving the existence of further natural inclinations open.
[80] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 94, aa. 2-3.
[81] John Finnis, 'Aquinas' Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy', 2.3, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/aquinas-moral-political/>.
[82] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 94, a. 2.

practical reason and 'are binding by natural law only insofar as they are mediated, or ordered, by reason.'[83]

Aquinas' basic practical principle is indeed fundamental, as, before any moral discussion, the guidance of practical reasonableness is needed because, prior to the question of what *should* be done, the question of what *could* be done always precedes. However, the purpose of practical reasoning is exactly to lead to moral principles and to understand and refine them, a process called conscience. For Aquinas, 'Someone whose conscience is sound has in place the basic elements of sound judgment and practical reasonableness,'[84] while conscience is binding, which means that it must always be followed, even if it is erroneous.[85] However, this does not, as some believed, lead to relativism or subjectivism, since it does not mean that the one who follows it and errs is not morally accountable for one's actions. In the words of Finnis, Aquinas' teaching about conscience 'is often misrepresented or misapplied as a kind of relativism or subjectivism. But it is actually an implication of Aquinas' clarity about the implications of regarding moral judgments as *true* (or false) and of thus *rejecting* subjectivism and relativism.'[86]

Since, as mentioned, the task of practical reasoning is to yield moral principles, the supreme moral principle it leads to is that one must love one's neighbour as oneself, which Aquinas sees as highly connected to the Golden Rule. All the other moral principles and norms can be inferred from this supreme moral principle, whilst they all constitute specifications of the aforementioned basic principle of practical reasoning. 'And what practical reasonableness requires,' Finnis writes, 'seems to be that each of the basic human goods be treated as what it truly is: a basic reason for action amongst other basic reasons whose integral directiveness is not to be cut down or deflected by subrational passions.'[87] The way, therefore, to ethically evaluate one's act is by identifying its relationship with human goods; if the act is in compliance with them, it is good, whereas if it is contrary to them, it is evil.[88]

Aquinas, with his incorporation of philosophical concepts into theology and his emphasis on human reason, was the first theologian to set forth a more developed

[83] James McEvoy and Philipp W. Rosemann, 'St Thomas Aquinas on Ethics, the Body and Suicide', *Philosophy of Science: Forum Trends in Experimental and Clinical Medicine*, 3.5 (1993), 33.
[84] Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 3.
[85] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 19, aa. 5-6.
[86] Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 3.1.
[87] Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 3.3.
[88] Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 3.4.2.

natural law theory. However, some modern Western ethicists saw the need for a contemporary revival and further expansion of the theory, shaping the 'new natural law theory'. The main reason for this was the fact that the Scholastic natural law theory, which dominated Catholic moral thought for centuries, is inadequate as it, in Grisez's words, fails 'to ground moral norms in human goods.'[89] Grisez, however, is not referring to Aquinas' natural law theory, as the name 'Scholastic' would suggest, but to the theory, as developed by Francisco Suarez and other theologians during the 16th and 17th centuries.[90] Moreover, the modern emphasis on Aquinas' inclinations, which correspond to human goods, instead of focusing on these human goods themselves has been erroneous and misunderstood Thomas' thought. It is inaccurate, for example, to focus on curiosity, which is the inclination of knowledge, rather than on the good of knowledge itself. In the words of Finnis, 'explanatory priority must be accorded to the basic human goods themselves, and to the self-evident desirability which makes each of them the object of an inclination in the will of anyone sufficiently intelligent and mature to understand their goodness.'[91]

The Thomist theologian expanded Aquinas' open-ended list of basic human goods, dividing them into 'existential' or 'reflexive', the ones that point to God's original harmony, which has been lost due to the introduction of the sin, and 'fulfill persons insofar as persons make free choices,' and 'substantive', the ones that are understood apart from choice.[92] Grisez identifies the following human goods: self-integration, 'which is harmony among all the parts of a person which can be engaged in freely chosen action,' practical reasonableness, 'which is harmony among moral reflection, free choices, and their execution,' sociability and justice, 'which are aspects of the interpersonal communion of good persons freely choosing to act in harmony with one another,' religion or holiness, 'which is harmony with God, found in the agreement of human individual and communal free choices with God's will,' life itself, 'including health, physical integrity, safety, and the handing on of life to new persons,' knowledge of truth and appreciation of beauty or excellence, and activities of skillful performance and play. Taken together, these goods tell us what

[89] Germain Grisez, *Christian Moral Principles* (1983), 7.1. All references cited from Grisez's *Christian Moral Principles* are sourced from the website 'The Way of the Lord Jesus' (http://www.twotlj.org/index.html).
[90] Grisez, *CMP*, 4.F.1-21.
[91] Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 2.6. This is why, presenting Aquinas' natural law theory, Finnis explicitly speaks of goods instead of inclinations. See Finnis, 'Aquinas' Philosophy', 2.5.
[92] Grisez, *CMP*, 5.D.8-11.

human persons are capable of being, not only as individuals but in community, while the pursuit of all these basic human goods leads to human fulfilment.[93]

However, due to our fallen state and the complexity of human life, the fulfilment of human goods is difficult, as we often violate and impair them, being unable to distinguish between the good that practical reasoning tells us to pursue and the evil that it tells us to avoid. This is exactly why a moral principle of discernment of the right choice is needed. This basic principle of natural law could be phrased in the following way: 'In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment.'[94] Still, the first principle of morality is too broad to deal with and tackle specific moral problems, which creates the need for 'modes of responsibility', the intermediate precepts that will clarify the general first principle and will lead us from it to particular norms. These precepts, which are eight, do not mention specific acts but are specifications of the first principle and direct willing toward morality.[95]

In short, the eight modes of responsibility are: 1. '*One should not be deterred by felt inertia from acting for intelligible goods*'; 2. '*One should not be pressed by enthusiasm or impatience to act individualistically for intelligible goods*'; 3. '*One should not choose to satisfy an emotional desire except as part of one's pursuit and/or attainment of an intelligible good other than the satisfaction of the desire itself*'; 4. '*One should not choose to act in accord with an emotional aversion, except when necessary to avoid some intelligible evil other than the inner tension experienced in enduing the aversion*'; 5. '*One should not, in response to different feelings toward different persons, willingly proceed with a preference for anyone unless the preference is required by intelligible goods themselves*'; 6. '*One should not choose on the basis of emotions which bear upon empirical aspects of intelligible goods (or bads) in a way which interferes with a more perfect sharing in the good of avoidance of the bad*'; 7. '*One should not be moved by hostility to freely accept or choose the destruction, damage, or impending of any intelligible good*'; and 8. '*One should not be moved by a stronger desire for one instance of an intelligible good to act for it by*

[93] Grisez, *CMP*, 5.D.11. However, it is worth mentioning that both Grisez and Finnis later added an eighth basic human good, that of marriage, which is both existential and substantive. For example, see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 85-92.
[94] Grisez, *CMP*, 7.F.1.
[95] Grisez, *CMP*, 7.G.2.

choosing to destroy, damage, or impede some other instance of an intelligible good.'[96] These eight modes cover every aspect of morality in human life and, if correctly understood, can solve any ethical problem as well as direct towards the ideal of integral human fulfilment in God.[97]

Now, from these modes, and only through practical reasonableness, or the supreme virtue of prudence, which is 'moved' not by passions but by reason (*synderesis*)[98] and concerns both means and ends,[99] we can deduce the more specific moral norms, as prudence accomplishes 'the vindication of first principles.'[100] Hence, based on whether actions conform to the modes of responsibility or not, we can ethically evaluate them, characterising them as good, permissible, wrong, or obligatory. For instance, the moral norm, according to which the act of contraception is always wrong, is justified by the fact that it always violates the eighth mode of responsibility, while vegetarianism can be either wrong or good, depending on intentions and circumstances. This is why it is only permissible until its relationship to modes of responsibility is defined.[101] Finally, although most moral norms, either affirmative or negative, are not absolute, which means that their moral character depends on 'additional information', that is, specific intentions and circumstances, some actions are absolutely forbidden. This means that no additional information can change the fact that the action is against a basic human good.[102] In the words of Finnis, 'Such precepts "bind always and for every situation"… There is never a time to be stealing or committing adultery. But affirmative precepts, while always binding, do not bind in every situation, but only relatively to time and place.'[103] This affirms the Catholic notion of the existence of intrinsically evil acts, i.e. acts that are always wrong regardless of any intentions or circumstances.

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[96] Grisez, *CMP*, 8.A-H.
[97] Grisez, *CMP*, 8.I.2. Finnis, instead of modes of responsibility, speaks of the 'basic requirements of practical reasonableness', which are the fundamental principles that guide human practical reasoning in the pursuit of the good and provide the practical and comprehensive framework for ethical decision-making. See Finnis, *Natural Law*, pp. 100-127.
[98] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 47 a. 6.
[99] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 66, a. 3. For more on the topic, see John Finnis, 'Prudence about Ends (1997)', in John Finnis, *Reason in Action: Collected Essays, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 173-186
[100] John Finnis, 'Introduction', in John Finnis, *Reason in Action: Collected Essays, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-15 (p. 12).
[101] Grisez, *CMP*, 10.B.2-3.
[102] Grisez, *CMP*, 10.C.1-12.
[103] John Finnis, 'Moral Absolutes in Aristotle and Aquinas (1990)', in John Finnis, *Reason in Action: Collected Essays, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 187-198 (p. 189).

This brief overview of Catholic moral theology, particularly its intrinsic anthropology, was essential for understanding the upcoming sections. Catholic teachings on concepts such as *imago Dei*, the beatific vision, autonomy, pride, and natural law provide a crucial foundation for comprehending the forthcoming Catholic perspectives on the nature, meaning, and beauty of the human body, as well as its beautification and modification.

4.1. The Human Body

As already mentioned, ancient philosophical dualistic approaches, mainly Platonism, affected early Christianity, in both the East and the West, and the early Western dualism, diminishing the value of the human body, regarded it as the enemy of the mind, which must be subjugated.[104] Additionally, the appearance of Manichaeism, the influential aforementioned views by Origen, and, even more, the emergence of Marcionism, an early Western Christian dualistic belief system deriving from the teachings of Marcion of Sinope,[105] highly influenced the thought of several early Western thinkers. According to Ambrose, for example, it is the soul that makes humanity,[106] the flesh is 'lowly' and 'vile',[107] and the body is nothing more than a mere garment, or even a prison, from which the soul's purity is constantly in danger.[108] Similarly, St. Jerome saw the body as a darkened forest filled with wild beasts,[109] while, even many years later, Anselm called the physical aspect of humans a 'body of humiliation'.[110] Praying to Mary, Anselm also expressed that the body is contrary to the soul, saying, 'If only my inmost being is on fire with the sweet fervor of your love, so that outer being of flesh might wither away. If only the spirit within me might come close to the sweetness of your love, so that the marrow of my body

[104] Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Embodiment and Moral Critique: A Christian Social Perspective', in *Theological Issues in Bioethics: An Introduction with Readings*, ed. by Neil Messer (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), pp. 85-101 (p. 86).
[105] For more on Marcion and his theology, see Ian A. McFarland, 'Marcion', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. by Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 296.
[106] Ambrose of Milan, *The Six Days of Creation*, 9.8.46; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 42: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, transl. by John J. Savage (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961), pp. 258-259.
[107] Ambrose of Milan, *On Paradise*, 3.16; Savage transl., p. 297.
[108] Ambrose, *Six Days*, 9.6.39; Savage transl., pp. 252-253, Ambrose of Milan, *On Cain and Abel*, 2.9.36; Savage transl., pp. 434-435.
[109] Jerome, *Letters*, 22.4; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. 6* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 102.
[110] Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayer Before Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ*, 37; Ward transl., p. 101.

might be dried up.'[111] Finally, for Pope Innocent III, the person is nothing more than 'nasty sperm, a sack of dung, and food for worms',[112] whilst our condition with animals is equal, as we have 'nothing more than the beast.'[113]

More recently, even more than in the East, the influence of the Renaissance and Enlightenment belittled the theological and ethical value of the human body in the Western world. As James Nelson elaborates, the highly influential philosophical thought of Descartes, according to whom the human body is nothing more than a machine subject to examination and alteration paved the way for the rise of modern Western dualism.[114] Additionally, although it is important to recognise that humanism and liberalism advanced human rights and freedoms, playing a crucial role in emancipating individuals who had been oppressed and denied their rightful autonomy, and contributing significantly to the fight against exploitation and dehumanisation, these movements also led to the divinisation of the human person, who took the place of God, and idolised personal autonomy. Autonomy no longer depends on reason, but solely on desires, while the body, losing its intrinsic meaning, no longer speaks for itself, but instead 'it now says what we want it to say.'[115] In the words of the Dominican priest and theologian, Herbert McCabe, 'in recent centuries the physical bodily aspect of our beliefs has been heavily played down. Partly because of some philosophical mistakes, we have got into the habit of thinking of the real person as an invisible immaterial being. Bodily actions are thought to be at best merely manifestations of the real human acts which take place invisibly.'[116] All these have fostered the notion that humans now possess absolute freedom to manipulate their bodies as they see fit, a notion that, as Mary Healy saw, has led to a 'cultural landscape littered with broken families, lost human dignity, lonely individuals and deep moral confusion.'[117]

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[111] Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayer to St Mary (3)*, 299-304; Ward transl., p. 124.
[112] Pope Innocent III, *On the Misery of the Human Condition: De Miseria Humane Conditionis*, ed. by Donald R. Howard, transl. by Margaret Mary Dietz (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. xxx.
[113] Innocent III, pp. 6-7.
[114] James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 125-126.
[115] Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.
[116] Herbert McCabe, *The New Creation* (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 57.
[117] Mary Healy, *Men and Women are from Eden: A Study Guide to John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Servant Books, 2005), p. 2.

Nevertheless, what the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches about the body, decisively closing the door to any notion for which Catholicism rejects or downgrades it, is that 'The flesh is the hinge of salvation. We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh' (CCC 1015). Catholic theology, therefore, defends the human body and the Catholic Church, in her majority, has robustly expressed her opposition to all these ancient and contemporary notions against the body. As Fisher characteristically writes, 'since the Catholic Church is for you, you should convert to being anti-abortion, anti-euthanasia, anti-cloning and prolife and love, pro- the sick and disabled, and pro- the body and its theology.'[118] Even more, not only is the body good, but it also plays a crucial role in spiritual life. As the Catholic Church proclaims, 'As a being at once body and spirit, man expresses and perceives spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols' (CCC 1146).

Moreover, although indeed spirit has priority over matter, it is both body and soul that make up the whole of human nature, and therefore, any dualistic approaches are rejected. From the Middle Ages onwards, and especially after the emergence of Scholasticism, in the 12th century, the influence of Platonism in the West gave its place to Aristotelianism, which criticised Platonic dualism and regarded both body and soul as essential for humans. Thus, in its majority, the Catholic tradition, against dualism, chooses its opposite, wholism, which 'emphasizes the integrity of the human person and opposes any attempt at those kinds of dichotomies that would diminish the dignity of human persons by splitting us up into superior and inferior parts.'[119] Human beings, in their totality, have value, dignity, and freedom not because of their soul alone, but because both the 'enspirited' body and the 'enfleshed' soul are human.[120]

Regardless of the aforementioned ancient dualism and rejection of the flesh, a number of early Western thinkers defended the body and its importance for the totality of the human person. The very first of them was Hermas, whose book *The Shepherd* became so popular and influential in the West that it almost acquired the status of a canonical New Testament book.[121] For Hermas, both flesh and spirit, due

[118] Fisher, p. 64.
[119] Kelly, Magill, and ten Have, p. 24.
[120] Kelly, Magill, and ten Have, p. 27.
[121] Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus Books, 1979), p. 48.

to their common eschatological destination, their resurrection, must be both guarded and purified: 'If you defile your flesh, you will also defile the Holy Spirit; and if you defile your flesh [and spirit], you will not live… for both (flesh and spirit) are common, and cannot be defiled, the one without the other: keep both therefore pure, and you will live unto God.'[122] Hermas, therefore, against the dualism of his time, emphasised 'the present significance of the flesh and the hope of its future resurrection.'[123]

However, the most important thinker of the first three centuries of the Latin tradition to defend the body was Tertullian, a fierce opponent of Marcion's dualism. As Bottomley notes, Tertullian did not only defend the body, but he argued that Christianity ascribes ultimate honour and respect to it.[124] According to him, the human person is one undivided psychosomatic entity and unless both body and soul are saved, we cannot be saved, while the body is even greater than the spirit; as the matter came first and the spirit second, since God initially made man from dust and then breathed His spirit into him, the human is 'a fabric of flesh, not of spirit.'[125] In addition, defending the body and attacking Marcion, Tertullian expresses, 'you are the only man that hates his flesh, for you rob it of its resurrection. It will be only right that you should hate the Church also, because it is loved by Christ on the same principle. Yea, Christ loved the flesh even as the Church… the same God is (the God) of the man and of Christ, of the woman and of the Church, of the flesh and the spirit.'[126] He also, in a Pauline fashion, distinguished between the sinful flesh and the sin of the flesh, stating that Christ was born to abolish not the former, but the latter, not the flesh per se, but its sin. In his words, 'We maintain, moreover, that what has been abolished in Christ is not *carnem peccati*, sinful flesh, but *peccatum carnis*, sin in the flesh, not the material thing, but its condition; not the substance, but its flaw.'[127] Finally, Tertullian, defending the resurrection of the flesh, argued that not only does the body cooperate with the soul perfectly, but it also is necessary for it in all aspects. 'The flesh', he states, 'which is accounted the minister and servant of the soul, turns out to

[122] Hermas, *The Shepherd*, 3.5.7; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 58.
[123] Bottomley, p. 50.
[124] Bottomley, p. 62.
[125] Tertullian, *Marcion*, 1.24; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 473.
[126] Tertullian, 5.18; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 3*, p. 811.
[127] Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 16; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 3*, p. 938.

be also its associate and co-heir. And if all this in temporal things, why not also in things eternal?' [128]

In the 4th century AD, the figure of Augustine of Hippo emerged in the West and his thought dominated Western theology for centuries. Augustine was the most influential Latin theologian, until the time of Aquinas, and he continues to be highly respected by the Catholic Church today, while his contribution to theology and philosophy is immense. Being the most prolific Latin thinker of the early Church, he could not fail to address the issue of the human body. Although he attacked the dualistic notions of his time, Augustine, before being converted, was an Origenist and a zealous Manichean, expressing views on the pre-existence of the soul, its entrapment in the body as punishment, and the identification of humans as mere souls. In his work, *Of the Morals of the Catholic Church*, for instance, he expresses the belief that 'Man… is a rational soul with a mortal and earthly body in its service.'[129] However, as John Rist stresses, these views had 'no Augustinian future,'[130] as, after his conversion, Augustine's perception of the body changes radically. 'The entire nature of man is certainly spirit, soul, and body; therefore, whoever would alienate the body from man's nature, is unwise,'[131] he, now, holds. He even became a fierce opponent of Manichaeism, writing many treatises and letters against it and defending the human flesh.

In doing so, he had to interpret Paul's epistles and especially his aforementioned themes on spirit, body, and flesh. As Nightingale points out,

> Augustine had been a Manichaean in his twenties, and he had to argue (for decades) that he was no longer a member of this sect. Though the Manichaeans venerated many different 'holy' texts, they placed great weight on Paul's Epistles: in their view, Paul had claimed that the body was evil and, indeed, a cosmic force battling against Goodness. Attacking

[128] Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 7; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 3*, p. 938. Although Tertullian's teachings were enormously influential for the early Church and are still held in high esteem by many Christian theologians and scholars, he was never recognized as a saint by the Latin Church, and, without ever being formally condemned, he was excommunicated by the Christian community of his time because of his later association with Montanism. See David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[129] Augustine, *Of the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 27.52; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 4* (Grand Rapidis, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 94.

[130] John M. Rist, *Augustine Deformed: Love, Sin, and Freedom in the Western Moral Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 372.

[131] Augustine, *On the Soul and its Origin*, 4.3; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 5* (Grand Rapidis, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 999.

> this Manichaean position, Augustine attempted to rehabilitate the body. He argued (often vituperatively) against Manichaean and other dualistic theologies that treated the body as inherently evil or sinful. But he could not make this argument without Paul. He thus offered new interpretations of Paul's references to the flesh and the body.[132]

In perfect alignment with his contemporary, Chrysostom, Augustine held that when saying 'flesh', what Paul designates is the corruption that will disappear at the resurrection;[133] not the nature of the body, but the sin of both body and soul.[134]

In addition, Augustine repeatedly maintained that all the passions of human life do not come from the outer part of humans but from the inner, as the purity of the former depends solely on the sanctity of the latter.[135] Even more, the purity of both body and soul derives from the free will of the individual.[136] All the passions, therefore, derive from the inside: 'the haughtiness of pride, the delight of lust, and the poison of curiosity are the motions of the dead soul.'[137] After his conversion, for Augustine, the body is no longer the prison of the soul, but its friend and even its spouse, while both elements are good. Human bodies are also not mere tools or ornaments, but a part of man's very nature.[138] Commenting Gal 5:17, Augustine characteristically notes,

> Far be it from us to believe, what the madness of the Manichees believes, that there are here shown two natures or principles contrary one to another at strife, the one nature of good, the other of evil. Altogether these two are both good; both the Spirit is a good, and the flesh a good: and man, who is composed of both, one ruling, the other obeying, is assuredly a good, but a good capable of change, which yet could not be made save by a Good incapable of change, by Whom was created every good, whether small or great.[139]

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[132] Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Once out of Nature: Augustine on Time and the Body* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press 2011), p. 212.
[133] Augustine, *On the Resurrection*, 15-17; Edmund Hill transl., pp. 251-254.
[134] Augustine, *The City*, 14.2; Dyson transl., pp. 582-583.
[135] See, for example, Augustine, *On Lying*, 10; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapidis, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 996 and *The City*, 1.18; Dyson transl., pp. 27-29.
[136] Augustine, *The City*, 1.28; Dyson transl. pp. 42-43.
[137] Augustine, *The Confessions*, 13.21.30; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapidis, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 490.
[138] Augustine, *The City*, 1.13; Dyson transl., p. 22.
[139] Augustine, *On Continence*, 18; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 3*, p. 821.

For Augustine, although the immaterial spirit is more excellent than the material body, the former is not the good substance and the latter the evil, but they both cooperate in both good and evil actions,[140] whilst the soul is equally present in every part of the flesh.[141]

Similarly, in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*), quoting Paul again, and following the Apostle's distinction between the nature of the body and the corruption of the flesh, he states that no one hates his or her own body, adding, 'And when some people say that they would rather be without a body altogether, they entirely deceive themselves. For it is not their body, but its corruptions and its heaviness, that they hate.'[142] Moreover, not only should we not hate our bodies, but we must love them.[143] However, this love should always stay 'within limits':

> Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself. For that he does love himself, and does desire to do good to himself, nobody but a fool would doubt. He is to be taught, too, in what measure to love his body, so as to care for it wisely and within due limits. For it is equally manifest that he loves his body also, and desires to keep it safe and sound.[144]

The love of our body, therefore, should not exceed the limits of care and protection, as, if it does, reaching the levels of worship, the sin of pride is committed. This is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve. The serpent, corrupting their spirit and not their flesh,[145] led them to pride. Thus, even though the results of the sin were physical, sin itself derived from the defilement of the soul. God, however, as the supreme Healer, 'seeing, then, that man fell through pride, He restored him through humility. We were ensnared by the wisdom of the serpent: we are set free by the foolishness of God.'[146]

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[140] Nightingale, p. 215.
[141] Augustine, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental*, 16; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 4*, p. 229.
[142] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.24.24; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapidis, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 1186.
[143] Augustine, *Doctrine*, 1.23.22; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 2*, p. 1185.
[144] Augustine, *Doctrine*, 1.25.26; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 2*, p. 1188.
[145] Augustine, *At the Handing Over of the Creed*, 8; *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century: Part 3 – Sermons, Vol. 6*, transl. by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1993), p. 145.
[146] Augustine, *Doctrine*, 1.14.13; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 2*, p. 1175.

The Latin Father, in his work *The City of God*, in addition to attacking Manicheans, attacked Platonists for their disbelief in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ in material and real flesh,[147] their rejection of the creation of the body directly from God,[148] their doubt of the eschatological resurrection of the human body,[149] their assumption that souls exist perfectly and eternally without their bodies,[150] and the fact that they ascribe 'all vices to the nature of the flesh.'[151] Finally, again defending the body, he also criticised Origen and his supporters for their view that the soul is trapped in the body because of its sins.[152]

The contemporaries and successors of Augustine in the West mostly followed his line of thought. Ambrose, for instance, although, as mentioned, did not think highly of the flesh, agreeing with him, held that sin comes primarily from within, from the free will of the soul, which the body is but a servant of.[153] Furthermore, several centuries later, Bernard of Clairvaux stressed that persons cannot exist without a body and that souls, even though nobler, cannot be perfectly happy without their bodies,[154] while Bonaventure emphasised the cooperation between the two realities. In his view, the soul must command and the flesh should obey, and 'whenever the reverse happens, the rectitude and proper government of the soul are cast from their place.'[155] It is true that these thoughts imply a dualistic devaluation of the body. However, as Rachel Davies explains, Bonaventure's emphasis is not on the distinction between the two, but on their unity,[156] a unity that derives from the divine will and the way that God created human beings. In Bonaventure's words:

> When God created the body, God joined it to the soul, uniting them to each other by a natural and mutual yearning. God placed the body under the government of the soul, creating it in a state of merit. To gain this merit, God willed that in this pilgrim state the soul should stoop down to the level of the body, directing its attention towards governing it. Hence,

[147] Augustine, *The City*, 10.29; Dyson transl., pp. 435-428.
[148] Augustine, *The City*, 12.27; Dyson transl., pp. 538-539.
[149] Augustine, *The City*, 13.17; Dyson transl., pp. 559-561.
[150] Augustine, *The City*, 13.19; Dyson transl., pp. 564-566.
[151] Augustine, *The City*, 14.5; Dyson transl., p. 588.
[152] Augustine, *The City*, 11.23; Dyson transl., pp. 478-480.
[153] Ambrose, Six Days, 1.8.31; Savage, pp. 34-36.
[154] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Conversion*, 12.24; *Selected Works*, transl. by G.R. Evans (New York; Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press 1987), p. 84.
[155] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2.11.3; *Breviloquium*, transl. by Dominic V. Monti, (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005), p. 94.
[156] Rachel Davies, *Bonaventure, the Body, and the Aesthetics of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 87.

> the soul cannot be fully happy unless a body is restored to it, because it has an inclination built into it by nature to be reunited with a body.[157]

As already mentioned, Scholasticism revived the ancient Greek thought in the West, especially Aristotelianism, which was inexplicably neglected in the East. Even though this revival began several years before Aquinas, in the works of eminent theologians, such as William of Auvergne, Philip the Chancellor, Robert Grosseteste, and St. Albert the Great,[158] it reached its full development only with the student of the latter, Thomas. As Ashley articulated, 'Thomas Aquinas… must be credited with the first thorough-going use of Aristotelian philosophy in theology, and if we can speak of an Aristotelian Christian Theology it is to be found in its most unqualified form in his work.'[159] Aquinas's influence on Western theology and philosophy was immense, while his moral teaching, especially as he presents it in *Summa Theologiae*, is highly fruitful and particularly significant.[160] Regarding matter, in particular, his adoption of Aristotelian hylomorphism,[161] which he faithfully followed throughout his work, played a crucial role in his anthropology,[162] as, based on the ancient Greek philosopher's thought, Thomas attempted to settle once and for all the problem of the relationship between body and soul. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, he suggests,

> Many had puzzled over how soul and body are made one; some claimed that there are intermediaries of some kind by which soul is united and in a way combined with body. But this puzzle is groundless, now that it has been shown that soul is the form of body. This is why Aristotle says that we need not ask whether soul and body are made one-just as we do not puzzle over this in regard to wax and its shape or in general in regard to any matter and the form of which it is the matter… Hence, just as body has existence through soul, as its form, so too it is united to soul immediately inasmuch as soul is body's form.[163]

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[157] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 7.7.4; Monti transl., p. 294.
[158] Ashley, pp. 150-152.
[159] Ashley, p. 152.
[160] Pinckaers, *Morality*, p. 26.
[161] The view that the soul is the form of body. The term comes from the Greek words *hyle* which means 'mater' and *morphe* which means 'form.'
[162] Petri, p. 198.
[163] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima, 2.1.234; *A Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima, transl. by Robert Pasnau (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 127.

For Thomas, who vigorously rejected Platonic dualism, humans are 'composed of a spiritual and a corporeal substance,'[164] neither of which is complete without the other, whilst they are both parts of the same nature.[165] Although the soul is nobler than the body,[166] matter is good, as it participates in goodness 'by its relation to, or aptitude for, goodness'[167] and was created on account of the goodness of God.[168] As Stephen Loughlin explains, in order to avoid dualism, Thomas vehemently stressed the unity between the two elements in human nature 'as being definitive of the human person.'[169] He, therefore, accepted the standard Christian viewpoint that humans are not only body or only soul but instead composites of both elements,[170] which are directly and naturally united with each other, whilst the soul is united with the body as its life-giving form[171] and exists in all of it.[172] This union happens in two ways, the corporeal, in which the soul understands through bodily senses, and the spiritual, which takes place when the body is separated from the soul after death, and in which the understanding of the soul happens 'by the infusion of species by God.'[173] These two components, body and soul (matter and form), are part of the essence of each individual and define him or her, as 'What is composed of this matter and this form has the nature of hypostasis and person. For soul, flesh, and bones belong to the nature of man; whereas this soul, this flesh and this bone belong to the nature of this man.'[174]

Moreover, as the soul is the form of matter, Aquinas, rejecting the theory of the pre-existence of the soul, held that not only it was created *with* the body, but it was created *in* the body.[175] In his view, as each of the two components is part of the human nature, it is impossible that God would have made the soul without the body or vice versa.[176] The human flesh comes not directly from God, but from matter directly

[164] Aquinas, *ST I*, prologue to q. 75.
[165] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4.35.9; *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book Four: Salvation*, transl. by Charles J. O'Neil (New York: Image Books, 1957), p. 178.
[166] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 3, a. 1.
[167] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 5, a. 3.
[168] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 65, a. 2.
[169] Stephen J. Loughlin, *Aquinas'* Summa Theologiae (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 97.
[170] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 75, a. 4.
[171] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 76, aa. 4-8.
[172] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 93, a. 3.
[173] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1.
[174] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 2.
[175] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 90, a. 4 and *ST III, Suppl*., q. 79, a. 1.1
[176] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 91, a. 4.

created by God, whereas the forming of the body is done directly by Him, without the intervention of angels.[177]

According to the 'Angelic Doctor', the body is not just an instrument or a garment of the soul, but it is absolutely essential for its existence. Just like the soul is necessary for the animation of the body, the body too, with its senses, is necessary for the soul's activities, for 'the intellectual soul had to be endowed not only with the power of understanding but also with the power of feeling.'[178] From the activities of the soul, only reason and will belong to it alone and remain active in it when body and soul are separated by death, whereas all the others, which have the whole human being as their subject, do not remain 'actually' but only 'virtually' in the soul, ready to act again when the two elements will be reunited by the resurrection of the flesh.[179]

Furthermore, our bodies are also essential for the knowledge of God and, consequently, the love for Him. Since humans are embodied creatures and gather information through their senses, they need 'sensible realities' for the knowledge and love of 'Divine things', whilst the most important of these realities is the Incarnation of Christ.[180] In fact, as the Thomist philosopher, Josef Pieper, put it, 'we are nonetheless never lifted so high as to perceive these realities in any other way than through the world of the senses,'[181] while, in the words of Pinckaers, for Aquinas, 'No matter how intellectual we are, we are not pure spirits. To receive the Word of God, we need tangible signs. The Word comes to us through our eyes and ears, by what is written and preached. We must also put this Word into practice in our own day. The Son of God walked this path in a surprising way, through the incarnation and the cross.'[182] Nevertheless, for Aquinas, as God does not have a body, our bodily senses are not capable of sensing Him by their own powers alone. He can only be understood by our mind only if He, by His grace, makes Himself intelligible to it.[183]

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[177] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 91, a. 2.
[178] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 76, a. 5.
[179] Aquinas ,*ST I*, q. 77, aa. 5-8.
[180] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 3.
[181] Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and Reality and the Good*, transl. by Lothar Krauth and Stella Lange (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 95.
[182] Pinckaers, *Morality*, p. 89.
[183] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 12, aa. 3-4.

Additionally, in his definition of 'person',[184] Aquinas again pays tribute to the body, as he expresses that, since the human person is an embodied person, a soul separated from the body cannot be characterised as such.[185] Also, commenting on Paul, he maintains that humans should love their flesh, as it is created by God and not by an evil principle, as Manicheans believed. What we should despise is not the flesh, but its defects due to sin:

> The Apostle did not shrink from the society of his body, as regards the nature of the body, in fact in this respect he was loth to be deprived thereof, according to 2 Corinthians 5:4: 'We would not be unclothed, but clothed over.' He did, however, wish to escape from the taint of concupiscence, which remains in the body, and from the corruption of the body which weighs down the soul, so as to hinder it from seeing God… Although our bodies are unable to enjoy God by knowing and loving Him, yet by the works which we do through the body, we are able to attain to the perfect knowledge of God. Hence from the enjoyment in the soul there overflows a certain happiness into the body… Hence, since the body has, in a fashion, a share of happiness, it can be loved with the love of charity.[186]

Although, as mentioned, perfect happiness does not consist of material things, the body still plays a role in it and participates in it alongside the soul.[187] The beatific vision, for Thomas, is perfect and complete only with the participation of the body. However, a disembodied soul alone can still be happy.[188]

In addition, on the one hand, we should love and care for our bodies, but, on the other, even though the body is good, the spirit is nobler, as the union between the two 'exists for the sake of the soul and not of the body; for the form does not exist for the matter, but the matter for the form,'[189] whilst humanity's last end, happiness, 'cannot

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[184] For more on Aquinas's theory of personhood, see Joseph Torchia, *Exploring Personhood: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Nature* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 125-155.
[185] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1.
[186] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 25, a. 5.
[187] For more on the role of the body in the ultimate happiness of the human person, see Joseph G. Trabbic, 'The Human Body and Human Happiness in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*', *New Blackfriars*, 92.1041 (2011), 459-564.
[188] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5.
[189] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 70, a. 3

consist in goods of the body.'[190] As McEvoy and Rosemann saw, Thomas chooses this middle-ground to avoid materialism and the idolisation of the body. In their words,

> While it is therefore true to say that Aquinas takes a very positive view of physical life and well-being, it is important to emphasise that Thomism, in avoiding the pitfalls of hyperspiritualism, still does not display the remotest affinity with any kind of materialism. For according to St Thomas, love of the body – a love which is licit and even morally required – can never be an end in itself… because the body draws all its dignity, significance and value from its twofold relationship with God as Creator and Consummator. Aquinas's theological, or 'sacramental', perspective upon the body hence rules out the idolization of the physical which is so characteristic of the 'desacralised' conception of the body that dominates large parts of modern culture.[191]

And because the soul is nobler than the body and sin is the disease of the soul, 'sin is a worse evil than body-disease, pain or suffering.'[192] Just like, as mentioned, Paul endured all the sufferings of his flesh, in order to not be arrogant, the body's adoration and apotheosis lead to the sin of pride. That is why Thomas proposed the adoration of God instead, which he associated with the humility of the body. As humans are both spiritual and physical, they offer to God an immaterial adoration, which has to do with the internal devotion of the soul, and a material one that 'consists in an exterior humbling of the body.' Just as prayer comes first from the inside and then is expressed verbally by the flesh, 'adoration consists chiefly in an interior reverence of God, but secondarily in certain bodily signs of humility.'[193] Thus, in order to love God and communicate with Him, human beings must be humble in the body and despise pride and vanity. In Ashley's phrase, 'the dignity of the matter is in its humility.'[194]

Thomas also affirmed the belief that the soul and not the flesh is the subject of sin. Every operation of the body comes either from a 'natural quality' of the body, such as

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[190] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 2, a. 5.
[191] McEvoy and Rosemann, 37.
[192] Peter Kreeft, *Practical Theology: Spiritual Direction from Saint Thomas Aquinas* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2014), p. 31.
[193] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 84, a. 2.
[194] Ashley, p. 697.

its physic-chemical properties, or from the soul that enlivens it.[195] And 'because the members of the body cannot in any way resist the sway of the soul'[196] and sins are not natural to the body, they proceed from the soul and they belong principally to it. In the case of the sin of gluttony, for instance, 'From the will, consenting to gluttony, concupiscence of food accrues to the concupiscible faculty, and partaking of food accrues to the hand and the mouth, which, in so far as they are moved by the will to sin, are the instruments of sin.'[197] Similarly, not only evil but good too derives from the soul, as 'the sanctity of the body is not forfeited so long as the sanctity of the soul remains'[198] and 'the source of meriting comes of the soul, whilst the body is the instrument of the meritorious work.'[199] Also, reason and not 'the irrational part of the soul' is the subject of virtue.[200] The activity of the body, for Aquinas, depends on the will of the soul[201] and 'the members of the body are not principles but merely organs of action: wherefore they are compared to the soul which moves them, as a slave who is moved but moves no other.'[202] Matter is not the principle of action, but it only receives the effects of it, whether good or bad.[203] The soul is the subject of both sin and sanctity and, by its union with the body, transmits them to it as well.[204]

Nevertheless, this transmission is one-way, as Thomas expressed the innovative, for his time, humanitarian view that, although when the body suffers the soul too is disturbed,[205] no defect or impairment of the body can affect the soul in its relationship with God, which is a merely spiritual and incorporeal act.[206] Evil exists as the privation of good.[207] Nevertheless, as it cannot destroy good in its wholeness,[208] a bodily defection, even though evil, cannot destroy the wholeness of the person. As

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[195] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 50, a. 1.
[196] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 81, a. 3.
[197] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 83, a. 1.
[198] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 163, a. 1.
[199] Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 49, a. 6.
[200] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 55, a. 4.
[201] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 17, a. 9.
[202] Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 74, a. 2.
[203] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5.
[204] A decade before Aquinas's birth, the Fourth Lateran Council, based on the view that the sickness of the body is transmitted to it by the sin of the soul, exhorted physicians to refer the sick to the 'physicians of the soul', in order for their spiritual health to be examined first, while it added, 'Moreover, since the soul is much more precious than the body, we forbid any physician, under pain or anathema, to prescribe anything for the bodily health of a sick person that may endanger his soul.' Fourth Lateran Council, *That the Sick should provide for the Soul before the Body* (1215); Tanner, *Vol. II*, pp. 245-246.
[205] Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 15, a. 4.
[206] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6.
[207] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 14, a. 10.
[208] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 48, a. 4.

Miguel Romero put it, despite the fact that Thomas affirmed that suffering a physical impairment is experiencing evil, he vehemently rejected 'any suggestion that a person afflicted somehow becomes essentially or inherently "defective." For Aquinas, the evil suffered in corporeal infirmity does not reduce, destroy, or transform the suffering person's essential nature into something subhuman, marginally human, or non-human.'[209] In the same way, even though blindness, for example, deprives a blind person of the good of sight, it cannot destroy 'every mode, species and order, but only such as follows upon the being of sight' [210] ergo, it does not deprive the person of her capacity to see God spiritually and reach supreme happiness.

Aquinas's theological anthropology was profoundly influential in the West, while the Catholic Church, not many years after his death, at the Council of Vienne, established his teaching regarding the human body, proclaiming that whoever 'stubbornly' denies that the soul is not the form of the body, is considered heretic.[211] Similarly, around two hundred years later, the Fifth Lateran Council affirmed this viewpoint, adding that 'The soul not only truly exists of itself and essentially as the form of the human body, as… promulgated in the general council of Vienne, but it is also immortal.'[212] The following centuries were marked by the aforementioned enormous influence of the Enlightenment. However, the second half of the 19th and, more vividly, the 20th century saw a massive revival of Thomistic theology, accompanied by an intense effort towards the restoration of the value and dignity of the human body, violated by the Enlightenment's rationalism.[213] As Walter Kaspar wrote, this revival, which culminated with the teachings of John Paul II, 'was the attempt to solve the modern crisis of theology by picking up the thread of the high scholastic tradition of mediaeval times,' while its goal 'was to establish a timeless, unified theology that would provide a norm for the universal church.'[214]

Both Pius XI and his successor, Pius XII, dealt with the subject of the human body. In his influential encyclical *Casti Connubii*, the former affirmed the Christian

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[209] Miguel J. Romero, 'Aquinas on the Corporis Infirmitas: Broken Flesh and the Grammar of Grace', in *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, ed. by Brian Brock and John Swinton (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 101-151 (p. 108).
[210] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 5, a. 5
[211] Council of Vienne, *Decrees*, 1 (1311-1312); Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 361.
[212] Fifth Lateran Council, *Session 8* (1523); Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 605.
[213] The revival was mainly originated by Pope Leo XIII and especially his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879.
[214] Walter Kaspar, *Theology and Church* (London: SCM Press, 1989), p. 1

doctrine that 'private individuals have no other power over the members of their bodies than that which pertains to their natural ends,'[215] while the latter agreed, adding that humans should respect the specific function that God gave to each fleshly organ.[216] Pius XII also stressed that many sciences and arts deal with the human body and, although religious and moral thought respects and accepts them, it goes further, as 'it teaches us to be mindful of the body's link with its first origin, and attributes to it a sacred character, of which the natural sciences and art have not, of themselves, any idea.'[217] In addition, remembering Paul's 1 Cor 6, he adds that our bodies do not belong to us, but to God and that their eschatological destination endows them with great value and dignity, because of which, they should be respected. On the other hand,

> It is sound to teach man to respect his body, but not to esteem the body more than is right. The most that is demanded is: care of the body, strengthening of the body – yes; but cult of the body, making a god of the body – no… Care of the body is not man's first anxiety, neither the earthly and mortal body as it is now, nor the glorified body made spiritual as it will be one day. The first place in man's composite being does not belong to the body taken from the earth's slime, but to the spirit, to the spiritual soul.[218]

This theological theme of respect yet not idolisation towards the body manifests the apparent Thomistic influence on the Pope.

Four years after Pius XII's death, the Second Vatican Council began. The council, once again, underlined the value of bodily life and the goodness of the human flesh, as it is created by God,[219] while it also inveighed against those who either devalue or idolise it.[220] Three years after the end of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI released the very important encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which, although was written in order to declare the viewpoint of the Catholic Church regarding the regulation of birth, it also reaffirmed the teaching that one's dominion over one's body is not unlimited.[221] The

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[215] Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 71 (31/12/1930).
[216] Pope Pius XII, 'Address to the Italian Medical Biological Union "San Luca", November 12, 1944', transl. by Michael J. Miller, *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*, 15.4 (2015), 728.
[217] Monks of Solesmes, *Papal Teachings on the Human Body* (Boston, Massachusetts: Daughters of St. Paul, 1960), p. 217.
[218] Solesmes, pp. 218-219.
[219] Vatican II, *GS*, 14; Tanner, *Vol. II*, pp. 1076-1077.
[220] Vatican II, *GS*, 41; Tanner, *Vol. II*, pp. 1094-1095.
[221] Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 17 (25/07/1968).

reactions around *Humanae Vitae* and the contraception debate formed the arena in which the Thomist Pope, John Paul II, began to develop his personalistic theology. However, it is true that, even before becoming John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, always within the general context of the topics of marriage and sexuality, started expressing his thoughts on the human body.[222]

John Paul II was a fierce opponent of rationalism, its dualism, and its contempt for the body. The principle 'I think, therefore I am', he says,

> also gave the modern concept of man its distinctive dualistic character. It is typical of rationalism to make a radical contrast in man between spirit and body, between body and spirit. But man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a spiritualized body, just as man's spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as an embodied spirit… When the human body, considered apart from spirit and thought, comes to be used as raw material in the same way that the bodies of animals are used—and this actually occurs for example in experimentation on embryos and fetuses— we will inevitably arrive at a dreadful ethical defeat.[223]

Furthermore, the Pope repudiated materialism, which leads to individualism, and hedonism, as it transforms the body into a mere instrument for pleasure.[224] In his words, 'the body is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency.'[225]

Due to its immense value and dignity, the body cannot be subject to complete human freedom and autonomy, which transform the body to '*presuppositions* or *preambles*, materially *necessary* for freedom to make its choice, yet extrinsic to the person, the subject and the human act.'[226] The Pope also based this argument on natural law, recalling the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Donum Vitae*,

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[222] See Petri, pp. 141-151; Angela Franz Franks, 'Thinking the Embodied Person with Karol Wojtyła', *Nova et Vetera, English Edition*, 16.1 (2018), 141–171.
[223] Pope John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19 (02/02/1994).
[224] For more on John Paul II's views on matter and materialism, see Christopher M. Cullen, 'Between God and Nothingness: Matter in John Paul II's Theology of the Body', in *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles*, ed. by John M. McDermott and John Gavin (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007), pp. 65-67.
[225] John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 23.
[226] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 48.

which proclaimed that natural law 'expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person' as well as sets how the Creator wants us to regulate our lives and make use of our own bodies. Since our body is not only organs, tissues, and biological functions nor can it be considered equal to the body of animals, its improvident and unbridled exploitation would have serious consequences, not for the flesh alone but for the whole person herself. 'In the body and through the body', the congregation continues, 'one touches the person himself in his concrete reality.'[227] Thus, 'only in reference', the Pope concludes, 'to the human person in his "unified totality", that is, as "a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit", can the specifically human meaning of the body be grasped.'[228]

The work, however, in which the Pope most clearly unfolded his rich teaching about the body was his 129 public audiences between 1979 and 1984, called *Theology of the Body*, the main purpose of which, besides his defence of the body against rationalism, was the defence of *Humanae Vitae*, as one of the most energetic proponents of the encyclical.[229] The influence of *Theology of the Body* on Catholic ethics, bioethics, and theology, in general, has been enormous and it is highly valued not only by Catholic[230] but also by most Eastern Orthodox thinkers. In the words of the important Eastern Orthodox theologian, David Bentley Hart, for instance, *Theology of the Body* 'enunciates with extraordinary fullness a complete vision of the spiritual and corporeal life of the human being', while it is not only totally consonant with the Orthodox understanding of human nature but also 'from beginning to end it is a text awash in the clear bright light of uncompromising conviction.'[231]

John Paul II's emphasis on the significance of the phrase 'from the beginning', which, as the exegete William Kurz stresses, is often overlooked by biblical critics,[232] is fundamental to his body theology. The original condition of the human person consists of the 'original solitude', the 'original unity', and the 'original nakedness', all

[227] Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*, 3 (22/02/1987).
[228] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 50.
[229] Janet E. Smith, p. 230.
[230] Although some Catholic moral theologians criticised certain aspects of it. For example, see Curran, *The Moral Theology*, p. 170.
[231] David B. Hart, 'The Anti-Theology of the Body', *The New Atlantis*, 9 (2005), 65-66.
[232] William S. Kurz, 'The Scriptural Foundations of the Theology of the Body', in *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles*, ed. by John M. McDermott and John Gavin (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007), pp. 27-46 (p. 33).

of which reveal the human body's dignity in the beginning. 'Original solitude' means the initial uniqueness of the human being among the rest of the creation, which is linked with the awareness and consciousness of the meaning of the human body,[233] whilst 'original unity' is the union in one flesh of our first parents, which possesses an ethical and a sacramental dimension, as 'the unity that is realized through the body indicates from the beginning not only the "body," but also the "incarnate" communion of persons… and requires the communion right from the beginning.'[234] Finally, as Healy explains, 'original nakedness' is the prelapsarian condition, in which the body did not cause shame, was an utter expression of the person, and, therefore, 'was not in danger of being treated as an object.'[235]

The Pope identified two other realities in human experience as well as the 'original man', that is, the 'historical man', which is the fallen and redeemed state of humans after sin, and the 'eschatological man', the final state after the resurrection.[236] Humans, due to the original sin, lost their glorified original state and cannot return to it, introducing the 'threefold concupiscence', which, as examined, albeit disturbs the body, comes from 'man's innermost being.'[237] As a result, the 'language' that the body used to speak on behalf of the person now often commits falsehood.[238] The only way to reread it properly is through self-mastery,[239] while, thanks to Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection, the body still remains the temple of the Holy Spirit and is potentially saved, as, 'if we live according to the true purpose of our lives, our bodies become vehicles and expressions of God's own love.'[240] In addition, the Pope, making an extensive analysis of Paul's distinction between body and flesh, and affirming the view that the Apostle was in no way condemning the flesh,[241] stressed that the human body is even a sacrament on its own, as it renders visible the invisible mystery of God.[242]

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[233] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 152 (General Audience 6, 24/10/1979).
[234] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 165 (General Audience 9, 14/11/1979).
[235] Healy, *Men and Women*, p. 29.
[236] Zachary Swantek, 'John Paul II's Theology of the Suffering Body', *The Person and the Challenges*, 9.1 (2019), 69.
[237] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 235 (General Audience 26, 30/06/1980).
[238] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, pp. 537-538 (General Audience 104, 12/01/1983
[239] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 632 (General Audience 123, 22/08/1984).
[240] Healy, *Men and Women*, p. 51.
[241] See John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, pp. 326-355
[242] Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners: Rediscovering the Meaning of Life, Love, Sex, and Gender, Third Edition* (North Palm Beach, Florida: Beacon Publishing, 2018), pp. 4-5.

In 2005, John Paul II's successor, Benedict XVI, agreeing with his predecessor, insisted on the unity between body and soul, emphasising that the body cannot be considered a mere object, and adding that 'Should he (man) aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness.'[243] Three years later, he repeated that whether we regard the body as nothing more than an object, we will end up commodifying it.[244]

All of the above manifests the respect that the Catholic tradition, in its majority, gives to the body, respect not only to the living but also to the dead bodies, especially the corpses of saints and martyrs, whose dead matter is supernaturally alive and powerful.[245] These bodies, which can even heal sicknesses and correct earthly excesses, are 'beautiful, intact, and resplendent as though still alive' as well as still fragrant with the 'odour of sanctity.'[246] In the words of Jerome, for the dead body of St. Hesychius, 'His tunic, cowl and cloak, were uninjured; the whole body as perfect as if alive, and so fragrant with sweet odours that one might suppose it to have been embalmed.'[247] Similarly, as Ambrose, when disinterred the headless bodies of St. Protasius and St. Gervasius, said, their power became manifest and they healed many people who were present, whilst all the signs of their triumphant death were present, as the tomb was still moist with blood and all the noble relics were intact and in the proper place and order.[248]

The Catholic faith, therefore, is a deeply fleshly religion, a fact that is also demonstrated by the participation of the flesh in all great Catholic mysteries: its anointment with oil, the eating and drinking of Christ's flesh and blood, the laying on of hands, the confessing with the lips, and the joining of the two sexes in one flesh. Thus, Catholicism, like Orthodoxy, by no means rejects the human body but instead

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[243] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 5 (25/12/2005).
[244] See Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants at an International Congress Organized by the Pontifical Academy of Life* (07/11/2008).
[245] For more on the Catholic appreciation of the bodies of martyrs and saints, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise And Function In Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Joan Carroll Cruz, *The Incorruptibles: A Study of the Incorruption of the Bodies of Various Catholic Saints and Beati* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1976).
[246] Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, transl. by Tania Croft-Murray (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 8-10.
[247] Jerome, *The Life of St. Hilarion*, 46; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 721.
[248] Bonaventure, *Epistles*, 22; *The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 26: Letter 1-91*, transl. by Sister Mary Melchior Beyenka (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 376-380

considers it crucial for both the earthly spiritual life and salvation in the afterlife. Precisely because of this importance, in the words of Anthony Fisher, 'we are not free to do "whatever we please" with our bodies, lives and talents.'[249] The human body, on the one hand, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, deserves our absolute respect; on the other hand, however, since it is not God itself, we should neither worship it, committing pride and vanity nor merely care for its pleasure and satisfaction, which leads to hedonism.[250]

Fisher identifies three contrasting conceptions of the human body. The first is *the body as property*, for which the body is merely a material possession, an object for personal use. Such a model, as Fisher sees, is 'indefensibly dualist and inclines people to instrumentalize their bodies and those of others.' The second conception, which is common in Catholic writing and teaching, is *the body as trust*, which sees the human flesh as a gift from God and regards human beings not as owners of their bodies, but as stewards and trustees. In this model, 'Bodily life is not a resource with which to do as we please, individually or as a community; it is given into our stewardship so that we might live well according to God's laws and the principles of practical reason (cf. Matt. 25:14–30). On this account, any other use of the body is an abuse.' However, in Fisher's view, seeing the body as merely a gift could still lead to its objectification and commercialisation. The third model is *the body as personal*. In Fisher's words, 'On this account, the body is the enfleshment of the soul, embodying the human person, while the soul integrates and informs the body. Even if there is more to me than my material elements, my living body is me; it is not something I own or give, it is the someone that I am.' This conception of the human body, for Fisher, is the most consistent with Catholic ethics.[251]

In addition, for the Catholic tradition, the unity between body and soul as well as the value of the human flesh are also confirmed by the bodily resurrection, which refutes any dualistic anthropological approach.[252] As Joseph Ratzinger, for instance, put it, any notion that excludes the flesh from the resurrection cannot be accepted

[249] Fisher, p. 268.
[250] Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 21.
[251] Fisher, pp. 186-189.
[252] Paul O'Callaghan, 'Eschatology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. by Lewis Ayres, Medi Ann Volpe, and Thomas L. Humphries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 229-248 (p. 233).

because it would imply a definite dualism in creation,[253] while, in the words of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, or Edith Stein, our impossibility to get rid of our bodies, even after death, 'indicates its special givenness. This union cannot be shaken; the bonds tying us to our bodies are indissoluble.'[254] Since human beings are created as a union of soul and body, the separation of the two elements in the afterlife would be unnatural, as, regardless of how important the soul is, if the body will not be the same, the person will not be the same either. Even after death, the immortal soul is not complete without its body and it yearns to be reunited with it, while the Catholic care for the dead bodies constitutes an affirmation of the belief in the resurrection.[255] In the view of Thomas Aquinas, even though, as mentioned, a disembodied soul on its own could still be happy, the soul's natural inclination towards happiness is not fully satisfied unless the whole person survives, as 'the state of the soul in the body is more perfect than outside the body, because it is a part of the whole composite.' The resurrection, therefore, is the miraculous yet natural movement toward the everlasting union of body and soul.[256]

The eschatological purpose of the human flesh not only showcases its value but also demonstrates how we ought to treat it and use it in the earthly life. Since bodies are so important that will accompany the souls to their eternal destination, humans cannot treat them at will, but only with the respect they deserve. As Jerome stresses, exactly because we will be raised in our earthly flesh and bones, just as Christ Himself was raised,[257] our earthly bodies must be elevated toward heaven through virginity, chastity, and fasting. 'I love the flesh,' he says, 'but I love it only when it is chaste, when it is virginal, when it is mortified by fasting: I love not its works but itself, that flesh which knows that it must be judged, and therefore dies as a martyr for Christ, which is scourged and torn asunder and burned with fire.'[258]

Despite all the appreciation for the human body, therefore, for Catholic theology, it is natural, and even noble, to endure bodily pains and give up physical things, even one's own earthly life, in the case of martyrs, for the benefit of the soul, as an

[253] Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, transl. by Michael Waldstein, ed. by Aidan Nichols (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), p. 192.
[254] Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. by Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989), p. 46.
[255] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 160.
[256] Aquinas, *ST III, Suppl*., q. 75, aa. 1-3.
[257] Jerome, *Letters*, 84.6; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 435.
[258] Jerome, *Letters*, 84.8. Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 438.

imitation of the life and death of Christ.[259] Thus, ascetic practices are not only absolutely legitimate but also constitute commandments of the natural law; for 'As it is natural that man should give up his external goods – money and property – for the sake of his bodily health, so it is not contrary to nature that man renounce the gratification of physical desire for the sake of his spiritual and intellectual life.'[260] Moreover, as mentioned, the view that Christians are called to endure bodily pains and sufferings for the sake of their soul has been repeatedly affirmed in the history of Christianity and, for Catholic theology, 'even defects of the body of all kinds that are sustained for the sake of divine love in this present world will contribute to a person's glory in eternity.'[261] However, the Catholic tradition went one step further, as it abounds in instances of voluntary mortification of the flesh and body mutilation for the sake of the soul, which will also be discussed in detail subsequently.

Furthermore, since, as examined, one must love but not idolise his or her body, this love must be temperate and this is why temperance, or else moderation, is the cardinal virtue most associated with the human body. As Aquinas put it, 'the temperate man desires pleasant things for the sake of health, or for the sake of a sound condition of body,'[262] while the sins of the flesh 'are comprised under the head of intemperance.'[263] Also, based on the aforementioned 1 Cor 12:24-26, according to which, God, making sure that all the body parts 'have the same care for one another', established harmony in the body, Pieper, in his book *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, writes that 'the primary and essential meaning of temperance is: to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole.'[264]

Finally, temperance is the only cardinal virtue that focuses on each individual herself. 'Temperance implies', as Pieper explains, 'that man should look to himself and his condition, that his vision and his will should be focused on himself.' However, although this turning to ourselves can be selfish and destructive, temperance is selfless and aims for genuine self-preservation. Intemperance, therefore, results in the unnatural egotistic love of one's self more than anything or

[259] See Candida R. Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[260] Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, p. 179.
[261] Andrew Pinsent, 'Catholic Perspectives on Human Biotechnological Enhancement', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 32.2 (2019), 192.
[262] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 6.
[263] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4.
[264] Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, p. 146.

anyone else, whereas temperance leads to the natural utmost love of God, as it is in accordance with the natural inclination of human beings to love God more than themselves. In that sense, temperance and intemperance are connected to humility and pride respectively In the words of Pieper, 'In "humility," the instinctive urge to self-assertion can also be made serviceable to genuine self-preservation, but it can likewise pervert and miss the purpose in "pride".'[265] Additionally, temperance is also associated with chastity, as, through the latter, in Aquinas's view, humans can use their bodies and their organs in moderation, according to their reason and free will.[266] Although the Catholic doctrine does not consider bodily pleasure as morally bad, this pleasure should be chaste and made possible only by moderation. As Pieper remarks, 'only a chaste sensuality can realize the specifically human faculty of perceiving sensual beauty, such as that of the human body, and to enjoy it for its own sake,' just like 'only those who look at the world with pure eyes can experience its beauty.'[267]

4.2. The Beauty and Beautification of the Body

This beauty of the world, created by God, has been highly appreciated since ancient Western Christianity, as, through the beauty of the cosmos, God is known, while the harmony of the universe reveals divine wisdom and power. Even though the world is not the real home of Christians, as their true home is not earthly,[268] it still remains a pleasant and beautiful place, in which God can reveal Himself to us. Most of all, however, the cosmos manifests God's supreme beauty, since 'The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator' (CCC 341). In Hilary's words, 'must not the Lord of this universal beauty be recognised as Himself most beautiful amid all the beauty that surrounds Him? For though the splendour of His eternal glory overtax our mind's best powers, it cannot fail to see that He is beautiful. We must in truth confess that God is most beautiful.'[269] It was this perfect beauty of God that drew Augustine, captivated him, and converted him to Christianity,[270] while Aquinas, agreeing with Dionysius, whose *Divine Names* was his main source and influence

[265] Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, pp. 147-151.
[266] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 151, a. 1.
[267] Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, pp. 166-167.
[268] Hermas, 3.1.1. Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 2*, pp. 48-49.
[269] Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 10.19; Philip Schaff, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol.* 9 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 200.
[270] Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.17.23; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 1*, p. 244.

when dealing with beauty,[271] held that God is Beauty Itself and that the beauty of creatures is merely their participated likeness to Him.[272]

As humans, created in the image and likeness of God, reflect the divine beauty more perfectly than any other creature, the beauty of the human body is particularly valued. The human flesh, which God has 'endowed with senses, compacted with limbs, beautified with form, and, for its general good and safety, hast introduced all vital energies,'[273] is even described as a work of art and God as the supreme artist.[274] Nevertheless, since for anything to be beautiful, it must possess both physical and spiritual lustre,[275] beauty is not limited to its aesthetic dimension but it also acquires a moral significance. In the thought of the Latin Fathers, as Pinckaers explains, 'Beyond visible forms, this beauty radiated from the inmost being of persons and their actions and qualified their very substance. This is why good actions were at the same time beautiful.'[276] Due to this ethical dimension of beauty and since, as we have seen, both morality and immorality are born in the soul, spiritual comeliness is recommended, as, for Catholic ethics, spiritual rather than physical beauty is identified with virtue. For example, in Aquinas's view, although many things may be called 'beautiful to the eye', this is not enough to call them virtuous, while just like a virtuous act is a beautiful act, a virtuous body is a beautiful body.[277] And as sin chiefly defiled the soul and made it ugly, this is the component we must strive to adorn first. Just as the soul of Francis of Assisi was first beautified and then his flesh participated in his soul's beauty with stigmata,[278] the only way to beautify our bodies is through the prior adornment of our souls.

This is why Western thinkers, throughout the ages, have repeatedly suggested the inner beautification, underlining the emptiness, and even immorality, of bodily adornment. St. Cyprian of Carthage, interpreting Leviticus 19:27, ferociously attacked those who engaged in the practice. 'Although', he writes,

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[271] Christopher Scott Sevier, *Aquinas on Beauty* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 113-114.
[272] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 13, a. 6.
[273] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.7.12; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 1*, p. 70.
[274] Bottomley, pp. 66-67.
[275] Francesca Aran Murphy, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 211.
[276] Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 31. However, as Aquinas saw, although the beautiful and the good are fundamentally identical, they differ 'in aspect'. Goodness relates to the appetitive faculty of man, as it is what we desire, while beauty to the cognitive, since it brings pleasure when is known or seen. Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 5, a. 4; *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 1.
[277] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 145, a. 2.
[278] Davies, p. 162.

> you clothe yourself in foreign garments and silken robes, you are naked; although you adorn yourself to excess both in pearls, and gems, and gold, yet without the adornment of Christ you are unsightly. And you who stain your hair, now at least cease in the midst of sorrows; and you who paint the edges of your eyes with a line drawn around them of black powder, now at least wash your eyes with tears. If you had lost any dear one of your friends by the death incident to mortality, you would groan grievously, and weep with disordered countenance, with changed dress, with neglected hair, with clouded face, with dejected appearance, you would show the signs of grief. Miserable creature, you have lost your soul; spiritually dead here, you are continuing to live to yourself, and although yourself walking about, you have begun to carry your own death with you.[279]

Moreover, as Augustine saw, we must rely on God's providence for our physical appearance, as He is the one who gave to flesh 'its origin, beauty, health, fruitfulness in propagation, and the disposition and wholesome concord of its members,'[280] in the first place. Bernard, in his *Apologia to Abbot William*, held that caring for the embellishment of the body and neglecting that of the soul is akin to 'entertaining the maid and murdering the mistress.'[281] He also vituperates the obsession with expensive and fashionable clothing, which leaves no room for a life of harmony and virtue,[282] and, recalling Phil 3:8,[283] suggests the contempt of corporeal beauty for the sake of incorporeal glory: 'For the sake of Christ we have abandoned all the world holds valuable and attractive. All that is beautiful in sight and sound and scent we have left behind, all that is pleasant to taste and touch. To win Christ we have reckoned bodily enjoyments as dung.'[284] Similarly, Albert the Great, commenting on the aforementioned Prov 31:30, contrasted the futility of the beauty of the body with the

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[279] Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, 3.30; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5* (Grand Rapids, Mchigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), pp. 779-780.
[280] Augustine, *The City*, 5.11; Dyson transl., p. 206.
[281] Bernard of Clairvaux, *An Apologia to Abbot Williams*, 8.16; Jean Leclercq and Michael Casey, 'Cistercians and Cluniacs: St Bernard's Apologia to Abbot William', in *Treatises I: The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux, Vol. 1*, ed. by M. Basil Pennington (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), pp. 3-69 (p. 53).
[282] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, 10.24; Leclercq and Casey, 60-61.
[283] 'What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.'
[284] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia*, 12.28; Leclercq and Casey, 64.

glory of that of the soul, adding that the former leads to vanity and the latter to virtue.[285]

Even more, as Bonaventure saw, sin not only polluted the soul but also came from neglecting its beauty and obsessing over the 'pleasure to the eye.' Eve, he describes, 'by listening to the serpent with her exterior perception, failed to read the inner book, which was legible to the right judgment of reason. She kept her mind on the outer book instead, and so began to focus on the external good.'[286] This disregard for spiritual beauty led to the Fall that resulted in the disorder between body and soul:

> And the irreparable disorder of humanity's parts means that it is no longer poised for physical beautification. By abandoning its contemplative calling, the soul's yearning to express itself in corporeality became corrupt, and human beings failed to become beautiful. Bodies became isolating, cramped-in spaces where once they were luminous vessels of spiritual communion… Because bodily death is a permanent consequence of original sin, there is no longer any guarantee that inward beauty will be able to express itself as corporeal beauty.[287]

In Bonaventure's sequence, then, the neglect of spiritual beauty led to the Fall that disrupted the order between the material and the immaterial, which in turn led to human ugliness. This is why postlapsarian humans excruciatingly try to beautify themselves, whereas, in the Edenic state, they had absolutely no need for beautification. Nevertheless, as bodily ugliness came from the neglect of the beauty of the soul, it is only through the latter that we can recover physical attractiveness.

On the other hand, the effort to make our bodies more attractive is not inherently bad, as long as it is not done at the expense of the beauty of the soul and is done in moderation. Very typical is the letter of Jerome to a woman called Eustochium, whom he warns against the pride of excessive beautification, not advising her to not adorn herself at all, as one would expect from an ascetic like Jerome, but to be adorned with moderation. 'Let your dress', Jerome exhorts, 'be neither too neat nor too slovenly; neither let it be so remarkable as to draw the attention of passers-by, and to make men point their fingers at you.'[288] For Jerome, extravagant dresses attract the attention of shallow men who value only the beauty of the body, failing to appreciate that of the

[285] Sevier, p. 160.
[286] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 3.3.2; Monti transl., p. 105.
[287] Davies, pp. 99-100.
[288] Jerome, *Letters*, 22.27; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 122.

soul.[289] Aquinas, agreeing with Jerome, expressed that excessive adornment is a sin, since 'if this were no fault, the word of God would not say so expressly that the rich man who was tortured in hell had been clothed in purple and fine linen.'[290] However, as material things per se are not immoral and sin derives from one's immoderate use of them, 'Although outward attire does not come from nature, it belongs to natural reason to moderate it; so that we are naturally inclined to be the recipients of the virtue that moderates outward raiment.'[291] Even though for a body to be beautiful, it must have three conditions, 'integrity', 'harmony', and 'clarity',[292] it is natural for human bodies to also be adorned with beautiful clothes and jewellery. Also, both men and women are allowed to use these methods, but not for unethical purposes, such as provocation to lust; for the goodness of the soul should still take precedence over the goodness of the body. In addition, specifically women 'are not forbidden to adorn themselves soberly and moderately but to do so excessively, shamelessly, and immodestly,'[293] while regarding cosmetics, they are not intrinsically wrong, as 'they are good when they hide disfigurements or ugliness' but 'deceptive when they are "false advertising".'[294] Even more, for Thomas, just like animals have their furs for protection and beauty, God gave us reason so that we adorn our bodies as we please.[295]

In Germain Grisez's view, beauty is one of the two ways in which 'bodily integrity is a good for persons' alongside health. This is why a good body is a healthy and beautiful one and acts of even removing body parts without affecting either of the two conditions are not ethically reprehensible. 'For example', Grisez says,

> it is not morally problematic to trim nails or hair in accord with prevailing styles… Acts intended to improve appearance that do not detract from any capacity also are morally acceptable in themselves, for example, removing excess fat. Even a materially disfiguring procedure which does not affect a

[289] Jerome, *Letters*, 22.23; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 118.
[290] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 169, a. 1.
[291] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 169, a. 1.
[292] Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 39, a. 8.
[293] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 169, a. 2.
[294] Kreeft, p. 202.
[295] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, 3.5.322; *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics (Aristotelian Commentary Series)*, transl. by Richard J. Blackwell, Richard J. Spath, and W. Edmund Thirlkel (Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1961), p. 161

> function is morally acceptable if it enhances appearance according to the standards of one's culture, for example, stretching the lips or ear lobes.[296]

Beautification practices, therefore, as long as they do not harm the health of the body, violating its natural capacities and functions, are considered ethically legitimate.

As for the canon law of the Catholic Church, it has limited its rules to the outward appearance of bishops and clergy and not of Catholic laity.[297] With regards to papal teachings on the subject, the only extensive one comes from Pius XII. Pius emphasised the relationship between modesty and moderation, which 'should go hand in hand, like two sisters,' and criticised women who, because of ambition and vanity, ignored these two virtues and gave in 'to the tyranny of fashion.'[298] However, the Pope repeated that clothing and bodily ornamentation are not in themselves evil. On the one hand, fashion is permitted by God and is natural to humans, as it keeps them in harmony with the customs of their time, but, on the other, it cannot be our ultimate goal. 'What God asks of you,' the Pope explains to Christian women,

> is to remember always that fashion is not, and cannot be, the ultimate rule of conduct for you; that beyond fashion and its demands, there are higher and more pressing laws, principles superior to fashion and unchangeable, which under no circumstances can be sacrificed to the whim of pleasure or fancy, and before which must bow the fleeting omnipotence of the idol of fashion.[299]

Finally, Pius XII stressed that excessive care for bodily beautification, albeit good for the flesh, is dangerous and 'not hygienic' for the soul, and, recalling female saints and martyrs, he suggested the embellishment of the soul.[300]

As already mentioned, for the Catholic tradition, the human body reflects the perfect beauty of God, as long as the soul first is beautified, or, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it, 'Purity of heart… lets us perceive the human body - ours and our neighbor's - as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty' (CCC 2519). In the name of this manifestation, John Paul II was the first Pope to restore Michelangelo's nude bodies of the Sistine Chapel, revealing their beauty, on

[296] Germain Grisez, *Living a Christian Life*, 8.G.1 (Chicago, Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), p. 541.
[297] For example, see Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 197 and pp. 242-243.
[298] Solesmes, pp. 44-45.
[299] Solesmes, p. 47.
[300] Solesmes, pp. 49.

the occasion of which, professor of Catholic systematic theology, Michael Bellafiore, characteristically expressed that 'of the three monotheistic religions, it is only Christianity, and at that, only Catholicism, which has permitted in its houses of worship the depiction of naked human bodies.'[301] In his panegyric homily for the restoration of the frescos, the Pope exalted both beauty and art,[302] while he most graphically expressed his sympathy for the latter in his *Letter to Artists*. In his view, as humans are the image of God, artists depict the Supreme Artist and Creator.[303] Moreover, due to the connection between beauty and goodness, the former is the vocation bestowed by God on the artist in the form of 'artistic talent.'[304] John Paul II also pointed out that the Church needs art in her vocation to communicate the Word of God.[305] However, unlike the art of the Supreme Artist, human art, coming from imperfect humans, can be sinful. Just as the beauty of anything material can be deceiving, so can that of art and this is why, in his *Theology of the Body*, the Pope, distinguishing between pornography and true art, underlined that only the art that produces the beauty of the embodied person properly, without triggering lustful thoughts, has the power to perfectly manifest the dignity and the beauty of the human body and can lead 'to the whole personal mystery of man.'[306]

Particularly for Church images, based on the fact that 'The icon is venerated not for its own sake, but points beyond to the subject which it represents,'[307] John Paul II defended their worship, a view that, in Western Christianity, has not always been taken for granted. The early Mediaeval dominance of Charlemagne in the West played a decisive role in that. Concerning icons, Charlemagne, 'with respect to the Eastern iconoclastic controversy… took a middle road,' as, although he acknowledged that Christian images have some value, he was opposed to their veneration. This led to the depreciation of religious icons, which were regarded as a Greek heresy, and to the estrangement between Christian art and the Catholic Church

[301] Michael Bellafiore, 'Paul on the Human Body and the Bodily Resurrection', in *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles*, ed. by John M. McDermott and John Gavin (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007), pp. 297-309 (p. 302).
[302] See Pope John Paul II, *Celebration of the Unveiling of the Restorations of Michelangelo's Frescos in the Sistine Chapel* (08/04/1994).
[303] Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, 1 (04/04/1999).
[304] John Paul II, *LA*, 3.
[305] John Paul II, *LA*, 12.
[306] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, pp. 376-377 (General Audience 63, 06/05/1981).
[307] John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*, 7.

of the time.[308] Even more, as some scholars saw, during the later Middle Ages, the aforementioned scholastic turn to philosophy led to the neglect of aesthetics from Western Christianity. Beardsley claims**,** 'In its period of flourishing and triumph, scholasticism made but one contribution to the history of aesthetics comparable in significance to its work in other philosophical fields – and this in the philosophy of language and symbolism.'[309] However, the Council of Trent dramatically changed the stance of the Catholic Church towards aesthetics and religious art. Calling for chaste art and placing restrictions on the artists, such as that 'figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust,' the Council affirmed the role of the holy images and legitimised their veneration,[310] which remains in place to this day.

For the Catholic Church, both art and the beauty of the body are respected on the ground that humans are made in the image of God. As for the former, since God was the first 'fine artist', His image too could not fail to have the ability and the urge to create fine and beautiful art.[311] Similarly, as God not only has supreme beauty but is Beauty Itself, His image as well could not but be beautiful. Yet both flesh and art depend their beauty and goodness upon the goodness of higher spiritual things. If the spirit is not pure, flesh and art are impure, if the spirit is not beautiful, flesh and art are ugly, and if the spirit is not virtuous, flesh and art are sinful.

Most of all, however, the beauty of everything depends on God. This is why it must be appreciated not with pride, but with humility and gratitude for the Holy Trinity's works of love. In the words of John Navone, 'The self-giving of Beauty Itself in the Beloved Son and His Spirit liberates us from the ugliness and futility of self-glorification for the beauty that is the glory of God, in which God delights.'[312] In addition, real beauty is eminently linked with the virtue most associated, as mentioned, to the body, temperance, since, as Aquinas saw, even though there is beauty in every virtue, it is mostly ascribed to temperance and this is for two reasons:

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[308] John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1987), p. 36.
[309] Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: The University of Alabama Press, 1975), pp. 89-90..
[310] Dillenberger, pp. 76-77.
[311] Armand A. Maurer, *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation* (Houston, Texas: Center for Thomistic Studies Maurer, p. 86. Also, Aquinas lists art among practical virtues. See Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 57, a. 3.
[312] John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, Pennsylvania: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 42.

> First, in respect of the generic notion of temperance, which consists in a certain moderate and fitting proportion, and this is what we understand by beauty… Secondly, because the things from which temperance withholds us, hold the lowest place in man, and are becoming to him by reason of his animal nature… wherefore it is natural that such things should defile him. On consequence beauty is a foremost attribute of temperance which above all hinders man from being defiled.[313]

Not only, therefore, temperance is itself beautiful, but it also makes humans beautiful, whereas intemperance destroys beauty.[314] Finally, Aquinas linked beauty with spousal love, as physical attractiveness is the first step for a truly beautiful love and a beautiful marriage.[315]

To sum up, on the one hand, the appreciation of Catholic theology for art and beauty, especially the beauty of the human body, is undeniable. Equally undeniable is the recognition of the need and desire of human beings to adorn their bodies and enhance their external appearance. On the other hand, the question to what extent can this be acceptable needs to be addressed, as one's obsession to beautify one's body, which is accompanied by neglecting the beauty of one's soul to vanity and pride. For Catholic ethics, just as sin and virtue come primarily from the inner self, and since beauty has not only an aesthetic but also a moral dimension, both attractiveness and ugliness derive from the soul first. Thus, spiritual beauty is the beauty that humans have to prioritise, which will give beauty to the flesh as well. Without this inner beauty, the attractiveness of the body alone, not only is futile but also defiles the entire psychosomatic human entity.

4.3. The Modification of the Body

God generously created us intelligent and free, calling us to share in His creative activity, in order to enhance the cosmos that Himself created, and in this vocation of ours, He does not want us to mechanically execute His orders, but rather He prefers us to be 'his genuine co-workers and encourages us to exercise real creativity.'[316] However, the main ethical question of Catholic bioethics with regard to body

[313] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 2.
[314] Pieper, *Cardinal Virtues*, p. 203.
[315] Maurer, pp. 75-76.
[316] Benedict M. Ashley, Jean deBlois, and Kevin D. O'Rourk, *Health Care Ethics: A Theological Analysis, Fourth Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), p. 93.

modification is whether the focal point of this creativity should be the altering of the human body and to what extent. To this question, and based on natural law, the modern Catholic ethicists, Ashley, deBlois, and O'Rourke, answer that bodily interventions are good inasmuch as they aim for the preservation of the health of the whole body. 'Natural law,' they write,

> should not be conceived of as a fixed pattern of human life to which human beings are forever confined. Rather, the Creator has made human beings free and intelligent, and it is precisely this intelligent freedom that is human nature and the foundation of natural moral law. Human intelligence, however, is not disembodied; it depends on a brain and a body that have a specific structure and purpose. In caring for their total health, persons have not only the right but the obligation to understand their psychological and biological structure and to improve themselves even in ways that may seem novel to past generations. Such improvement is good stewardship of the share in divine creativity with which God has endowed humankind, provided it perfects and not destroys what he has given us already.[317]

The destruction of the body has concerned Western thinkers since early Christianity, as the most commonly found and discussed form of modifying the body, within the Catholic tradition, is body mutilation. Early Latin theologians, however, rejected the practice in the cases that it is done willfully for spiritual reasons. St. Clement of Rome, for example, as early as the the 1st century AD, commenting the aforementioned Mk 9:43-47, and seeing a clear danger of a literal interpretation of the passage, explained,

> Let none of you think, brethren, that the Lord commended the cutting off of the members. His meaning is, that the purpose should be cut off, not the members, and the causes which allure to sin, in order that our thought, borne up on the chariot of sight, may push towards the love of God, supported by the bodily senses.[318]

[317] Ashley, deBlois, and O'Rourk, p. 94.
[318] Clement of Rome, *Recognitions*, 7.37; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 278.

Similarly, Tertullian associated the practice with Marcion's dualist and heretic ideas that denigrated the body,[319] Jerome criticised Origen for castrating himself 'out of a zeal for God,'[320] while Augustine emphasised that the gods who want their faithful to be emasculated should not be worshipped by anyone.[321] Later, Aquinas, quoting Chrysostom, who, as analysed, repeatedly castigated body mutilators, articulated that, since sin resides in the will and not in the flesh, 'in no case is it allowable to maim oneself, even to avoid any sin whatever.'[322] The official Catholic Church, similarly, distinguished between the castration that is being made as medical amputation or the one that resulted from the enemies on the battlefield from willful self-emasculation, as the latter derives from the ignorance of how to properly 'struggle against the vice of the flesh' and is ethically rejected and even regarded as 'homicide' against oneself.[323]

Despite these prohibitions, as already mentioned, self-mutilation was common in the early Church. Even more, as, for many centuries, it has been widely believed that the deliberate pain of the body is connected with the good of the soul, cases of deliberate self-harm, body mortification, and willful mutilations of the flesh by several pious men and women became very popular within the Catholic tradition.[324] As Sarah Covington put it, 'The physically marked and violated body represents a highly charged zone of contradiction and paradox: in the west it conveys the ultimate state of abjection and revulsion, yet it is also honored through Christ's wounds.'[325] Moreover, in Ariel Glucklich's phrase, the lives of Western saints and mystics 'abound with descriptions of self-tortures and even self-mutilation.'[326] Justifying these practices, Augustine exhorted us to get 'pierced with the thorns of repentance'[327] and stressed that those who scourge their bodies 'in the right spirit', do not hate them and

[319] Tertullian, *Marcion*, 4.11; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 3*, p. 602.
[320] Jerome, *Letters*, 84.8; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, p. 437.
[321] Augustine, *The City*, 7.27; Dyson transl., p. 320.
[322] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 65, a. 1.
[323] Pope Urban III, *Dilectae in Christo* (date uncertain); Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals, 43rd Edition*, 762 (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2013), p. 249.
[324] See Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995); Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001); Donald Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology: Academic Debates at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).
[325] Sarah Covington, 'Teaching the Wounded Body: Mutilation and Meaning in Western War and Religion', *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, 19.2 (2008), 14.
[326] Glucklich, p. 79.
[327] Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 58.14; Roberts and Donaldson, *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 8* (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), p. 475.

do not desire to destroy the flesh itself, but 'those habits and affections of the soul that lead to the enjoyment of unworthy objects. They are not destroying themselves; they are taking care of their health.'[328] Hence, it is possible for one to deliberately suffer bodily pains and even amputations and still love his or her body, desiring thereby to obtain spiritual goodness. In contrast, the ones who do it 'in a perverse spirit', engage in such practices out of hatred for their bodies because they misinterpreted Paul's teachings, which are not against the body but against carnal desires.[329] Thus, as Augustine saw, the self-imposed mortification and suffering of the body are not per se bad, but their morality depends on the reasons behind them.

This notion was accepted within the Catholic tradition for centuries, since voluntary mortification was not considered a denial of the body, but, in contrast, a manifestation of its significance and an imitation of Christ's flesh, the suffering of which gave life to humanity.[330] In the words of Balthasar, 'There is no Resurrection and no Eucharist without Gethsemane, no understanding of God's love without the cross.'[331] As Elaine Scarry observed,

> The self-flagellation of the religious ascetic… is not an act of denying the body, eliminating its claims for attention, but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world are cancelled and the path is clear for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force… It is… the imagery of intensely private visions that partly explains why the crucifixion of Christ is at the center of Christianity.[332]

Furthermore, during the 19th century, the French schools of spirituality within the Catholic Church introduced 'dolorisme', an ascetic spirituality characterised by the exaltation of physical pain, which, in the view of the Catholic ethicist, Antonio Autiero, manifested 'a certain poverty of theological and anthropological understanding.'[333] One can say, therefore, that for many centuries, in the Catholic tradition, pain and sin have been inextricably linked, since, on the one hand, the

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[328] Augustine, *Doctrine*, 1.24.24; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 2*, p. 1186.
[329] Augustine, *Doctrine*, 1.24.25; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 2*, p. 1186-1187.
[330] David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 205.
[331] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theological Anthropology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 333.
[332] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 33-34.
[333] Antonio Autiero, 'The Interpretation of Pain: The Point of View of Catholic Theology', in *Pain: A Medical and Anthropological Challenge (Acta Neurochirurgica Supplement 38)*, ed. by J. Brihaye, F. Loew, and H. W. Pia (Vienna: Springer, 1987), pp. 123-126 (p. 124).

former is a result of the introduction of the latter and, on the other, sin can be avoided and cured through pain.

Nevertheless, *Gaudium et Spes*, which harshly repudiated the practices that infringe human integrity, such as mutilation and torments inflicted on the body, decisively and totally overturned the Catholic view on the matter:

> Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself… all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.[334]

Around thirty years later, John Paul II, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, characterised these acts intrinsically evil, reaffirming the Catholic Church's viewpoint on the matter.[335] It is worth mentioning, however, that, as we shall examine presently, not every mutilation is intrinsically evil and the act itself is sometimes licit, since willful and unjustifiable mutilations are what the encyclicals referred to. As for deliberate painful self-injuries, although the traditional Catholic teaching holds that bodily suffering is often a way of participating in the sufferings of Christ as well as 'an educative punishment,'[336] the use of the pain-relieving means of modern Medicine is suggested.[337] As Lisa Sowle Cahill wrote, the idea that self-inflicted suffering has a redemptive meaning 'goes back to traditional interpretations of salvation through Christ's death on the Cross as "penal substitution" that have been problematized in modern theology.'[338] However, some instances of extreme physical self-harm for

[334] Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 27; Tanner, *Vol. II*, p. 1086.
[335] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 80.
[336] Grisez, *Living*, 1.E.6, p. 32. Grisez goes on to say that 'because pain is not an intelligible evil but only a sensible one… people may purposely inflict it on themselves, provided they do not detract from their comeliness or health, for some good end: penitential practices of scourging oneself or wearing a hair shirt, psychological experimentation with the sensation of pain, and so on. Grisez, *Living*, 8.G.1, pp. 541-542.
[337] Kevin O'Rourke, 'Pain Relief: The Perspective of Catholic Tradition', *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 7.8 (1992), 486-487.
[338] Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Suffering: A Catholic Theological-Ethical View', in *Suffering and Bioethics*, ed. by Ronald M. Green and Nathan J. Palpant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 231-248 (p. 237).

spiritual reasons still take place among Catholics, such as the practices of flesh flagellation and voluntary crucifixion performed in San Fernando, Philippines.[339]

For the Catholic Church, therefore, deliberate bodily tortures and mutilations infringe human integrity and are intrinsically evil acts, whilst intentional harm, based on the principle that 'evil may not be done for the sake of good', is always unreasonable.[340] Nevertheless, the difference between self-mutilation and medical amputation is enormous, as the act itself of cutting the flesh, if undertaken for therapeutic reasons, is not only morally acceptable but even recommended in cases where it can benefit the organism as a whole. And this is because of the Catholic 'principle of totality', according to which, albeit we, as not the proprietors but only the stewards of our flesh, do not have complete power over it, we can allow a fleshly part to be cut off or destroyed if this is necessary for the good of the totality of our bodies. Even though, therefore, 'tampering' with our bodily organs and their natural ordinations is ethically reprehensible, in the words of Janet Smith, 'it is also certainly true that not all tampering is immoral. For instance, there is little controversy about the moral permissibility of medical procedures necessary for the health of an individual that may result in blindness or sterility.'[341]

The Latin theologian who first touched upon the totality of the body was Augustine, who, however, did not link it with health, but with beauty: 'A body which consists of members, all of which are beautiful, is by far more beautiful than the several members individually are by whose well-ordered union the whole is completed, though these members also be severally beautiful.'[342] The first Catholic thinker to speak of bodily totality with regard to health and mutilation was Aquinas.[343] Highlighting that a bodily member should not be mutilated, 'unless otherwise nothing can be done to further the good of the whole,' Thomas maintained that, although bodily members are by nature good and useful for the body, sometimes 'accidentally', they can be harmful and dangerous for its wholeness. In these cases, it is legitimate, with the prior consent of the autonomous owner of the member, 'to cut away the

[339] Glucklich, p. 35.
[340] John Finnis, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1991), pp. 54-55.
[341] Janet E. Smith, p. 82.
[342] Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.28; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 1*, p. 501.
[343] Although he also linked totality with the beauty of the body, since, as mentioned, one of his three conditions for beauty is integrity, which, as Beardsley explained, 'is wholeness: being all there.' Beardsley, p. 103.

member for the welfare of the whole body, since each one is entrusted with the care of his own welfare.'[344]

Nevertheless, although the principle of totality was not introduced by him, Pope Pius XI gave its most well-known and used formulation in Catholicism, expressing that, since one's only power over one's body is the one that pertains to its natural ends, humans 'are not free to destroy or mutilate their members, or in any other way render themselves unfit for their natural functions, except when no other provision can be made for the good of the whole body.'[345] However, no other Catholic theologian has dealt with the topic of totality more than Pope Pius XII, who expanded it to include healthy body parts as well. In his view, humans have the right to remove not only a diseased but also a healthy organ, if it is proven to be detrimental to the whole body, and this right is given to us by God Himself. As humans have received the use of the whole organism by Him, they have the right to sacrifice a bodily part, healthy or not, 'if its continued presence or functioning causes notable harm to the whole, a harm which cannot otherwise be avoided.'[346]

In contrast to the 'traditional' account of the principle of totality, and despite the aforementioned expansion by Pius XII, some modern ethicists suggested the further expansion of the doctrine to the extent that it could allow more body alteration practices. In their view, the doctrine, as expressed by Aquinas and the two Popes, fails to safeguard the value of the whole psychosomatic union of the person, for it is limited to its biological good, neglecting any psychological and sociological aspect. Moreover, as they saw, the strict interpretation of totality focuses solely on health, neglecting human freedom, which already has been respected by the classical manuals of Catholic moral theology.[347] It is true, however, that the official Catholic Church defended the traditional principle of totality, based on her belief that human freedom and autonomy are not limitless. In the words of Pope Paul VI, for example,

> one must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions; limits which no

[344] Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 65, a. 1.
[345] Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 71.
[346] Solesmes, p. 278. For more on his development on totality, see Gerald Kelly, 'Pope Pius XII and the Principle of Totality', *Theological Studies*, 16.3 (1955), 373-396.
[347] As Klaus Demmer describes, 'One recalls the often cited example of the chained prisoner who cuts off his hand in order to gain his freedom which cannot be attained in any other way.' Klaus Demmer, 'Theological Argument and Hermeneutics in Bioethics', in *Catholic Perspectives on Medical Morals: Foundational Issues*, ed. by Edmund D. Pellegrino, John P. Langan, and John Collins Harvey (Dordrecht; Boston, Massachusetts: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), pp. 103-122 (p. 115).

> man, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly surpass. And such limits cannot be determined otherwise than by the respect due to the integrity of the human organism and its functions… according to the correct understanding of the 'principle of totality' illustrated by our predecessor Pope Pius XII.[348]

Despite the criticism, it is a fact that, exactly because it respects the psychological and sociological aspects of human life, the traditional account of the principle of totality, in addition to allowing and even recommending medical amputation, also allows the cases of 'reasonable' cosmetic surgery and charitable organ donation, which are not only justified but even praised, in the case of the latter, by the Catholic Church.[349] Regarding cosmetic surgeries, although Catholic ethics holds that inner beauty is much more important than outer appearance, it still recognises that, especially in modern society, the latter is vital to human life. Based on this, not only body alterations for medical reasons are acceptable but even a plastic surgery procedure can be morally justified under certain circumstances.[350] If the purpose of the aesthetic surgery is the restoration of a malformation that causes serious not only medical but also psychological, or sociological complications, it can be ethically justified, whereas, if it is carried out merely to enhance external appearance and sexual attraction, it cannot, as 'Certainly it is unjust for a society to devote so much of its resources to vanity when the poor lack necessities.'[351]

As for organ and tissue transplantation, in John Paul II's phrase, the practice is praiseworthy if 'performed in an ethically acceptable manner, with a view to offering a chance of health and even of life itself to the sick who sometimes have no other hope.'[352] Even though donating one's body parts to someone else might contradict the principle of totality, and, although humans, as not the owners but only the stewards of their bodies, have limited power over their organs, transplantation, under certain circumstances, is not only justified but also regarded as a supreme act of love towards the neighbour. As the Catholic moral theologian and priest, Gerald Kelly, put it,

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[348] Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 17.
[349] Ashley, p. 421.
[350] Grisez, for instance, holds that 'for example, a man whose ears are unusually large but functional may have them cosmetically remodeled even at some small sacrifice or function' and 'a young woman may choose to have healthy tissue removed from her unusually large breasts.' Grisez, *Living*, 8.G.1, pp. 542-543.
[351] Ashley, deBlois, and O'Rourk, pp. 108-109.
[352] John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 86. Also, see his *Address to the International Transplantation Society* (29/08/2000).

> It may come as a surprise to physicians that theologians should have any difficulty about mutilations and other procedures which are performed with the consent of the subject but which have as their purpose the helping of others. By a sort of instinctive judgment we consider that the giving of a part of one's body to help a sick man is not only morally justifiable, but, in some instances, actually heroic.[353]

For Catholic theology, therefore, body modification practices, even in the form of mutilation, can be ethically accepted, in the case of the aesthetic restoration of deformities, imposed, for the sake of the good of the bodily, mental, or sociological well-being of the individual, or even admired, in the case of organ and tissue donation. These, besides the doctrine of totality, can be also confirmed by the Catholic principle of 'double effect', according to which, the cure or even the salvation of the body and the soul would be the intended act, whereas the intervention on the former, or even its destruction, is the proportionate side effect.[354] On the other hand, needless, willful bodily mutilations are intrinsically evil, as they violate the integrity of the human person. The answer to the question of whether the specific body modification practices of tattooing and body piercing theologically pertain to this category will be attempted in the next section.

4.4. Tattooing and Body Piercing

Although Latin Fathers have not addressed specifically the morality of tattooing, some mentions on the practice are found, describing penal tattooing, which, as examined, was practiced in the Greco-Roman world. Cyprian, for example, spoke of an 'inscription' on the foreheads of some Christian confessors,[355] while Ambrose mentioned that slaves are marked with the name of their master.[356] In addition, some early Catholic references to the morality of body piercing exist, as a means of female

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[353] Gerald Kelly, *Medico-Moral Problems* (St. Louis, Missouri: The Catholic Hospital Association, 2012), p. 246.

[354] The principle of double effect comes originally from Aquinas, in his treatment of intentional homicide in cases of self-defence. Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 64, a. 7. For more on the doctrine, see D. Brian Scarnecchia, *Bioethics, Law, and Human Life Issues: A Catholic Perspective on Marriage, Family, Contraception, Abortion, Reproductive Technology, and Death and Dying* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010), pp. 73-84 and Christopher Robert Kaczor, *Proportionalism: For and Against* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2000).

[355] Pontius of Carthage, *The Life and Passion of Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr*, 7; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 5*, p. 481.

[356] Ambrose of Milan, *On the Death of Valentinian*, 58; *Political Letters and Speeches*, transl. by J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 390.

external beautification, which, as analysed above, Latin Church Fathers repudiated. Tertullian, for instance, declared that embellishment practices, such as piercings, lead to the 'pride of women,'[357] while the only true ornaments of the ears are the words of God.[358] Commodian stressed that earrings, among others, are used not by Christian modest women, but by unrighteous ones, inviting women to get pierced with chaste feelings instead,[359] while Jerome, praising a woman called Demetrias for embracing the vocation of a virgin, congratulates her for renouncing futile earthly things, like her costly earrings.[360] Augustine, however, mentioning male piercing as well, was more rigid, asserting, 'As for the accursed superstition of wearing amulets (among which the earrings worn by men at the top of the ear on one side are to be reckoned), it is practiced with the view not of pleasing men, but of doing homage to devils.'[361] Piercing, therefore, as a beautification practice, or even as an 'accursed superstition', was not accepted by the Fathers of the Latin Church.

As for the question of whether tattooing and piercing constitute mutilation, with which the previous section ended, it is not easy to answer, as there is no clear theological definition of what exactly mutilation is. In 1956, Gerald Kelly, in his influential article 'The Morality of Mutilation: Towards a Revision of the Treatise', after affirming that unjustifiable mutilation is intrinsically evil, expressed that 'The problem of the moralist… is not to decide whether mutilation is contrary to the natural law but to determine the limits of justifiable mutilation according to natural law.'[362] In his effort to identify these limits, he attempted a classification of physical mutilations. Dividing them firstly into two main categories, the *contraceptive* and the *non-contraceptive* mutilations, he defined the latter as 'any procedure, except direct sterilization, which interferes either temporarily or permanently with the natural and complete integrity of the human body.'[363] Kelly consequently divided the non-contraceptive mutilations into *major* mutilations, which 'destroy or remove an organ, permanently suppress a bodily function, or cause a notable and permanent impairment

[357] Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.6; Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4* (Grand Rapids, Mchigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), p. 24.
[358] Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, 3.3; Geoffrey D. Dunn, *The Early Church Fathers* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 113.
[359] Commodian, *On Christian Discipline*, 59-60; Roberts and Donaldson, *Vol. 4*, p. 393.
[360] Jerome, *Letters*, 130.7; Schaff, *Series II, Vol. 6*, pp. 634-637.
[361] Augustine, *Letters*, 245.2; Schaff, *Series I, Vol. 1*, p. 1251.
[362] Gerald Kelly, 'The Morality of Mutilation: Towards a Revision of the Treatise', *Theological Studies*, 17.3 (1956), 330.
[363] Gerald Kelly, 'Mutilation', 328.

of a higher function which depends on the body' and *minor* ones, to which all the other non-contraceptive mutilations belong.[364] In addition, he mentioned that mutilations can also be divided into *direct* and *indirect*, *licit* and *illicit*, and *self-mutilations* and *mutilations of others*.[365] Based on these divisions, therefore, one could deduce that tattooing and body piercing, if considered mutilations, would belong to the non-contraceptive, minor, direct, illicit, self-mutilations.

Kelly does not at all refer to tattoos and piercings, which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether tattooing and body piercing can themselves be classified as mutilations. Moreover, the fact that there is not a precise definition of mutilation in the papal documents, combined with the fact that the typical definition given in Catholic manuals is, as Kelly puts it, 'defective',[366] makes the theological examination of the connection between mutilation and modification even more challenging. However, one year later, in his book *Medico-Moral Problems*, Kelly will include body piercing in mutilations, quoting the Roman Catholic bishop Bert J. Cunningham, who, dividing mutilations in major and minor, listed piercing in the minor ones, as, although it does neither remove a bodily member nor seriously impairs its function, it still violates the integrity of the body.[367] Additionally, Kelly will later offer his own broad definition of mutilation as

> any procedure which interferes, even temporarily, with the complete integrity of the human body. This general description refers to surgery, irradiation, or any other treatment, such as the use of drugs and chemicals. It includes serious things like the excision of a kidney, as well as minor procedures such as blood transfusions and skin grafts. It is not limited to the removal of organs or the suppression of functions; it extends also to such things as circumcision, exploratory operations, cosmetic surgery, and so forth.[368]

In Kelly's view, therefore, minor body modifying procedures, such as tattooing and piercing, also constitute mutilations. However, as Kelly adds, mutilations can be either justifiable or unjustifiable, based on whether they are 'in accordance with sound

[364] Gerald Kelly, 'Mutilation', 329.
[365] Gerald Kelly, 'Mutilation', 329-330.
[366] Gerald Kelly, 'Mutilation', 327.
[367] Gerald Kelly, *Problems*, p. 7.
[368] Gerald Kelly, *Problems*, p. 8.

principles' or not.[369] In this case, the word 'mutilation', as Kelly uses it, when referring to justifiable practices, does not pertain to the inherently evil acts that Catholic teaching absolutely rejects. This means that the physically, mentally, and sociologically often beneficial use of tattooing and piercing would almost certainly exclude them from the list of unjustifiable body mutilations. Several decades later, the bioethicist, David Albert Jones, also distinguishing between justifiable and non-justifiable practices, argued that the Catholic Church uses the term 'mutilation' in a strict sense, leaving out tattooing and body piercing, among other interventions. However, as he adds, 'This is not to say that such modifications of the body are always morally justifiable but rather that the justification requires consideration of the particular circumstances, risks, burdens, and benefits. In contrast, mutilation in the strict sense is harmful per se and is condemned independently of circumstances.'[370] Hence, the Catholic Church indeed would probably adopt a narrower definition of mutilation that leaves out minor procedures, meaning that tattooing and piercing, in their conventional cosmetic form, are not inherently evil. Thus, in order to ethically evaluate these practices, besides the act itself, the specific intentions and circumstances of each individual case should be examined.

In light of the preceding analysis concerning the place of the human body, of its beauty and beautification, and of body modification in the Catholic tradition, it follows that the moral acceptability of tattooing and body piercing hinges upon their perceived contributions to the physical, psychological, or sociological well-being of the individual. If these practices are beneficial to such well-being, they may be deemed morally acceptable within the framework of Catholic moral theology. Conversely, if tattooing and body piercing primarily serve to inflate one's pride and vanity, they cannot be regarded as morally permissible.

However, the safest way to reach conclusions about the morality of the two practices from the standpoint of Catholic moral theology is through the lens of natural law theory. As Grisez describes, when there is no consensus on a moral norm, when a norm requires further specification, or when a relevant norm to a moral problem simply does not exist, as was the case with *in vitro* fertilisation when it first came into sight, and as is the current case with body modification, one has to go back to the

[369] Gerald Kelly, *Problems*, p. 8
[370] David Albert Jones, 'Infant Male Circumcision: A Catholic Theological and Bioethical Analysis', *The Linacre Quarterly*, 85.1 (2018), 55.

moral principles of natural law and examine whether the act complies or not with the aforementioned modes of responsibility, violating or respecting the basic human goods of natural law.[371]

Of course, the most relevant human good in regard to body modification is bodily well-being, which is connected with the health and the beauty of the body. According to Grisez, when an act does not detract from either of these two, it is not wrong, while if it detracts from either, it is always morally reprehensible.[372] And even if we accept that tattooing and piercing, as beautification practices, do not detract from bodily beauty – although, as we saw in the second section of this chapter, this is highly debatable in theological terms – they can still detract from the good of health, as already discussed in the cases of the medical complications of the practices. Even more, as Grisez again articulates, actions that mutilate, harm, or risk harming the body are always ethically reprehensible, as their morality 'parallels the morality of actions of which cause or risk death.'[373] And since, while acknowledging that most tattoos and piercings, in their conventional form, do not mutilate or severely harm the body, still many of them risk harming it. In this instance, they cannot be ethically accepted, unless they are therapeutic, in which case the imminent harm can be regarded as a tolerable side effect.

Another basic human good that can be associated with body modification acts is that of sociability and friendship, since they constitute cultural phenomena with often important sociological ramifications. Even in the cases where these practices would not harm ot risk harming bodily well-being, they would obviously still be considered morally wrong if they violated this basic human good. As Grisez says, modification practices that do not affect either the health or the beauty of the body and conform to prevailing social standards, such as nail trimming, hair cutting, or removing excess fat are ethically legitimate. Ethically legitimate can be even physically disfiguring procedures, such as lips or ear lobes stretching, if they enhance appearance according to one's cultural standards. However, Grisez, using tattooing as an example of a body modification procedure, expresses that, although acts that do not detract from the goods of beauty and health are permissible, 'yet a procedure which does not affect any function and is favored in some cultures – tattooing, for instance – can be

[371] Grisez, *Living*, 5.D.3, p. 265.
[372] Grisez, *Living*, 8.G.1, pp. 541-542.
[373] Grisez, *Living*, 8.G.1, p. 541.

offensive to others and so have an antisocial significance, by virtue of which it becomes morally wrong.'[374] For natural law, therefore, even if body modification practices did not violate, or risk violating, the goods of bodily health and beauty, they would still be ethically rejected if they were offensive to society, violating the good of sociability.

Thus, from all the above, one could deduce that, based on natural law theory, tattooing and body piercing can be characterised as 'permissible', as their moral status always depends on their relationship with basic human goods and modes of responsibility. On the one hand, they can be ethically accepted when they do not violate either of the two aforementioned basic human goods. In contrast, they cannot be morally permitted if they violate the basic human good of bodily life and integrity, while, even if these practices were not dangerous to bodily welfare, they would still be ethically reprehensible in the occasion that they violated another basic human good, that of social life. In terms of natural law, therefore, the two practices may violate these two human goods and the seventh and eighth modes of responsibility of natural law, according to which, one should never destroy, impede, or damage any intelligible good. The exceptions in which they would not raise any moral concern are when: a) there is no physical risk nor antisocial conduct, or b) they are beneficial and the harm is considered a morally acceptable side effect.

Regarding the former, although indeed body modification practices have always had potential health complications, it is important to recognise that not all forms of bodily alterations carry the same level of risk. As already examined, several factors contribute to the degree of risk associated with these practices, which clearly implies that ethical judgments cannot be uniformly applied across all cases. The assessment, therefore, of whether tattooing and body piercing pose risks to the good of bodily health, and to what extent, varies based on the specific nature of each practice. Even more, although considerations of antisocial conduct can vary depending on societal norms and values, it is true that, in many modern societies, tattooing and body piercing are increasingly accepted and integrated into mainstream culture, thereby diminishing their association with antisocial conduct in the eyes of many. Still, the practices cannot be accepted if they undermine the good of sociability.

[374] Grisez, *Living*, 8.G.1, p. 541.

In terms of the latter, examining each motivation separately, if bodily beautification is approached with a balanced perspective, one that avoids obsession and neglect of spiritual adornment, while steering clear of associations with pride and vanity, tattooing and piercing can indeed contribute to the individual's well-being. The same applies to the cases where the practices are being carried out for the reasons of genuine and rightful sociability, body art, reflection of self-identity, expression of faith, and the marking of inner experiences and emotions. Contrarily, intentions such as mere attention-seeking, pursuit of extreme experiences, and exercising body control and body ownership, stemming from pride, and often putting bodily health at major unnecessary risk,[375] fail to meet ethical standards on their own. To summarise, we can conclude that, if used for the treatment or protection of the physical, mental, or sociological health of their carrier, body piercing and tattooing are not necessarily wrong. However, as long as they unnecessarily violate the God-given bodily integrity, derive from pride and vanity, or are associated with idolatry, which 'always is a very grave matter',[376] they are problematic from the point of view of Catholic ethics.

In a manualistic approach, one could say that these acts can be morally problematic due to the fact that they violate the nature of our largest organ, the skin. And, even though tattooing and piercing do not actually violate a natural function of the skin, except in the cases of extreme modifications and severe medical complications, a totally accurate and strict interpretation of physicalism would still dismiss the acts, since no skin naturally has decorative holes or paintings, while the natural purpose of the ear, for example, is not to carry earrings, but to listen. However, as in the case of contraception, which is considered inherently evil by the Catholic Church, not based on manualist grounds, as some accused her, but on personalist ones, as it is 'contra-life' and 'contra-marriage', hence, against the human person as well,[377] bioethical problems cannot be ethically examined based merely on physicalistic principles.

And real Catholic personalism, such as that of John Paul II, following Aquinas, is not one that neglects the flesh, as a physicalist would claim, but, in contrast, one that

[375] As Grisez argues, while engaging in risky tasks, such as choosing a hazardous occupation or participating in an extreme sport, can be justified under certain circumstances, taking up a risky activity merely 'to experience the thrill' of it would be wrong, as it would entail unwarranted risks. Grisez, *Living*, 8.C.3, p. 487.
[376] Grisez, *Living*, 1.K.2, p. 63.
[377] See John Finnis, 'The Dual Foundation of *Humanae vitae*', *Anthropotes*, 34.1-2 (2018), 251-284 and, perhaps somewhat critically of Grsiez and Finnis, Janet E. Smith, pp. 88-89.

bestows to it the value and dignity it deserves, equating it with the human being, as the person does not simply *have* a body, but *is* a body.[378] For the Pope, the human body, on the one hand, is obedient to the laws of nature, enacted by God, and, on the other, it transparently expresses the person,[379] which manifests its importance. As Petri writes,

> The pope routinely affirms the importance of the body and obedience to nature as morally normative. Yet part of the delicate balance of John Paul's method in *Theology of the Body* is not to subordinate the freedom of the human person to the dynamics of nature so that he becomes guilty of the same pure naturalism or physicalism that he had criticized in the past. He wants to insist upon man's uniqueness but at the same time the pope articulates man's indebtedness to the creator of nature who has given him the gift of existence.[380]

This value of the body, given to us by God, is exactly the reason why, on personalist grounds, humans are not allowed to treat it as they please. Therefore, interventions such as the ones under consideration cannot be justified insofar as they stem from autonomous, conscious, and informed choices, violate natural law, and do not take place for the good of the flesh or the psyche.

This chapter, rooted in Catholic moral theology, explored the ethical dimensions surrounding tattooing and body piercing, delving into Catholic theological perspectives concerning the human body, its beautification, and modification. Following this exploration, the thesis will conclude with a comparative analysis of the viewpoints from both Christian traditions, highlighting their similarities and differences on the matter.

[378] As Grisez writes, because of the unity of body and soul, 'a person's body is not something he or she has, but a constitutive part of what he or she is.' Grisez, *Living*, 8.A.1, p. 464.
[379] John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, p. 154 (General Audience 7, 31/04/1979).
[380] Petri, p. 170.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

All the aforementioned analysis of both Catholic and Orthodox perspectives on various theological issues has demonstrated a positive and promising conclusion: that their similarities are far more than one might have expected and certainly exceed and outweigh their differences. Let us first examine these differences in more detail.

5.1. The Differences

It is true that much can be said about the differences between Catholic and Orthodox ethics and bioethics, such as their emphasis on different aspects, their distinct terminologies, and the methodological approaches that each of the two traditions follow in their quest for moral life.[381] For example, the clear Catholic distinction between 'cardinal' and 'theological' virtues, which is generally foreign to Eastern Christendom;[382] the appreciation and extensive use of natural law in the West as opposed to the East;[383] the place of the Bible, which, in contrast to Catholic ethics, has always been more central in Orthodox moral theology; and the fact that Catholic ethics is far more analytical are only a few of them. Those general elements, however, between the two moral theologies will not concern us, as we will suffice to mention the more specific and relevant, to the present work, differences.

While Orthodox ethics has always been personalistic, a different school of thought, namely physicalism, emerged within Catholic moral theology, which emphasises the bodily aspect of human nature. However, acknowledging potential over-generalisation, it is true that Catholic theologians gradually embraced a more personalist approach from the 20th century onwards. This fact undeniably underscores a growing similarity between the two traditions over time, suggesting a greater convergence between Orthodox and Catholic ethics compared to earlier periods.

Additionally, both traditions accuse each other of falling into 'the Scylla of absolutism', on the one hand, and the 'Charybdis of relativism,' on the other, as the philosopher Leo Strauss calls them,[384] since the notions of 'moral absolutes' and

[381] For the main differences between Catholic and Orthodox bioethics, in general, see H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., 'Orthodox Christian Bioethics: Some Foundational Differences from Western Christian Bioethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24.4 (2011), 487-499.
[382] Perry T. Hamalis and Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Toward a Godly Mode of Being: Virtue as Embodied Deification', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 26.3 (2013), 276.
[383] See Paul Babie, 'Natural Law in the Orthodox Tradition', in *Christianity and Natural Law: An Introduction*, ed. by Norman Doe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 36-57.
[384] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 162.

'intrinsically evil acts' are fundamentally different between the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox theologies. The traditional Catholic view that there are 'negative prescriptions that are binding always and everywhere'[385] has led Orthodox thinkers to speak of legalism and absolutism, while, on the contrary, the Orthodox Church, which has not adopted these concepts and emphasises not law and obligation but divine economy is often been accused of relativism by the West.[386] This fundamental contrast in approach constitutes perhaps the most important difference between the moral theologies of the two traditions. However, the Catholic Church, as examined above, would probably not classify tattooing and body piercing as mutilations, which suggests that they are not inherently evil acts. Hence, for both traditions, the moral evaluation of the practices extends beyond the act itself to include intentions and circumstances, rendering this difference, although indeed significant, ultimately irrelevant to the subject under discussion.

5.2. The Similarities

For both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, human life, created in the image and likeness of God, is sacred, while humans are the only earthly creatures gifted with reason and free will. But this free will is neither absolute nor arbitrary, since it depends on divine perfect freedom, and this is why both theologies challenge the absolute character that modern bioethics gives to the principle of autonomy. Human beings, making bad use of this very autonomy, sinned with the sin of pride and fell short of the perfect state in which they were originally created, besmirching the image of God. Despite this, and because of God's infinite love for us, there is still room for repentance in this earthly life and redemption in the next, eternal one. That is why, for both traditions, the need for a moral life is of immense importance.

Regarding the human body, both traditions respect it immensely, as they both speak of its value and dignity, disassociating it from the 'fleshly' desires, and holding that the soul, with its carnal tendencies, leads to sin. The human person is an indivisible whole of body and soul, and although the soul is nobler, dualistic

[385] Christopher Tollefsen, 'The Future of Roman Catholic Bioethics', *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 43.6 (2018), 674.
[386] For more on these discussions, see M. Cathleen Kaveny, 'What is Legalism?: Engelhardt and Grisez on the Misuse of Law in Christian Ethics', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 72.3, (2008), 443-485.

approaches that devalue the body and reject the unity between the two are incompatible with Christian teaching.

As for beauty and beautification, for both the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions, the human body, originating from God, is beautiful. Still, a beautiful soul is much better and more respectable, as Christian theology emphasises spiritual beauty and the goodness of the inner aspect of the human person. The beauty of the soul, rooted in Christian spirituality, transcends mere physical appearance, pointing to our inner qualities and virtues. This is why, although trying to make our bodies appealing and caring for our external embellishment is not only not bad but even necessary, especially in modern society, the extreme and obsessive bodily beautification that ignores the beautification of the soul is associated with pride and vanity, and is, therefore, rejected. The two Christian traditions equally understand and respect one's need to outwardly modify oneself, but not, however, arbitrarily. On the one hand, the aforementioned dignity and value of the body do not allow us to treat it, let alone modify, it at will. On the other hand, since both physical and mental health, as well as social welfare are highly valued, if an alteration practice aims to address a physical, psychological, or social problem, the moral barriers are lifted and the act is not considered immoral.

Inferentially, as for the moral evaluation of tattooing and body piercing, it can be said that, for both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology, the practices are not morally reprehensible in the occasions that they act beneficially for the bodily, the spritual, or the social well-being of the individual. On the contrary, given their, often serious, potential harmful complications, and based on the motivations for carrying tattoos and body piercings, as they were mentioned in the corresponding chapter, in cases where the practices are associated with pride or idolatry, they are morally reprehensible. One can say, therefore, that Orthodox and Catholic ethics are in complete agreement in their answer to the question of whether they could accept the modifying practices of tattooing and body piercing. And their answer is unambiguous: Yes, but under strict conditions.

In his work, 'The Immorality of Tattoos', Matej Cibik, based on the permanent nature of the practice, expresses that some tattoos are unjustifiable to one's future self, hence, immoral. Nevertheless, as he adds, 'if the tattoo is not controversial and is a

product of stable preferences, then ethics will have nothing to say about it.'[387] In other words, for Cibik, if the tattooed person is not at risk of regretting his or her decision in the future, then the act is justified, whereas, if the practice were not permanent, ergo irrelevant to the 'future self', there would be no conceivable moral obstacles whatsoever. Nevertheless, this view, although not necessarily wrong, cannot be aligned with the stance of Christian theology, both Catholic and Orthodox, on the matter. On the one hand, one's desire to alter his or her body and to infringe its God-given integrity forever can in no way be morally neutral. On the other hand, however, the fact that tattooing, for Christian bioethics, is morally problematic is not based solely on the permanence of the practice and the possibility of eventual regret, but mainly on its likely connection with vanity and pride, as well as on the fact that it, often needlessly, endangers the health of the individual. Thus, there can be no substantial distinction between the morality of tattooing and that of body piercing, since both, as examined, have medical complications and both, when purely decorative, can be associated with vanity and pride, regardless of the permanence of each one. This is why Christian bioethics' moral evaluation of the two practices cannot be different. After all, the permanent or not permanent consequences of an act would play a more significant role in a consequentialist model of morality.[388]

Moreover, the view that, given the recent glorification of autonomy, modern bioethics could not – and should not – object to body modification practices, has been expressed. After all, according to it, the choice is made by an individual, for the individual, and it does not harm anyone else, thus, the view that such practices can be considered unethical is, at best, outdated.[389] As Simon Woods put it, 'the idea that one may offer a moral critique of tattooing in an age in which the god of personal autonomy erects a barrier around the personal space of every autonomous individual might seem absurd.'[390] However, as analysed, neither the Orthodox nor the Catholic

[387] Matej Cibik, 'On the Immorality of Tattoos', *The Journal of Ethics*, 24.2 (2020), 205.
[388] Possible medical complications are, of course, consequences as well, but the act is not morally judged on its eventual outcome. In other words, unnecessary risk-taking is what is considered immoral regardless of whether there will be health complications or not. By contrast, in Cibik's argument, only if the future self regrets the act, is the act unethical, so the morality of the act rests solely on the consequences and not at all on the act itself, intentions, or circumstances.
[389] See Daniel Miori, 'To Ink or not to Ink: Tattoos and Bioethics', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 193-205.
[390] Simon Woods, 'Writing on the Body: The Modern Morality of the Tattoo', in *Tattoos – Philosophy for Everyone: I Ink, Therefore I Am*, ed. by Fritz Allhoff & Robert Arp (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 206-218 (p. 213).

Church agrees with the absolute character of autonomy.[391] While contemporary bioethics echoes 'Act, whether for good or bad, as long as you do it autonomously,' Christian ethics simply answers 'Act in goodness.' Even more, the two Churches maintain their long-standing traditions since the time of the Apostles. This, in no way, implies that they should ignore later social, cultural, and scientific developments, having a monolithic and obsolete view of things. Nor, however, can they change its steadfast teachings, such as those on personal autonomy and the value of the human body, just because modern culture mandates the acceptance of certain practices and values. In other words, Christian theology should maintain a balance between adaptability and doctrinal stability, which, of course, extends to bioethical questions, such as the morality of tattooing and body piercing. In the words of Mark J. Cherry,

> Secular bioethics appears no longer able to appreciate what could possibly be wrong with such activities, provided that the individuals involved consent in some fashion. Consequently, many actions that were once openly and easily recognized as sinful have become so commonplace, as well as politically desirable, as to appear as if they were obviously good. To recognize such actions as sinful is to reject what the dominant secular culture considers necessary conditions of human freedom.[392]

Returning to tattooing and piercing, as has already been made clear, they are not fundamentally against human nature, since, in most cases, they do not inherently violate the dignity and integrity of the human body and the whole person in general. Therefore, for both moral theologies, the Eastern Orthodox, which focuses on divine economy, and the Catholic, for which the two practices would not be considered intrinsically evil, their moral evaluation requires the examination of the specific motivations and circumstances. Also, the research on the perspectives of the two traditions regarding body modification showed that permanent bodily alterations can be ethically viewed in four distinct lights. Firstly, they may be rejected if deemed to unnecessarily mutilate the human body or stem from sinful volition. Secondly, they can be accepted, whether they are physically, mentally, or socially beneficial, such as

[391] See Angelos Mavropoulos, '"My Body, My Choice": A Comparative Study between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian Bioethics on the "Absolutization" of Autonomy', *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 14.4 (2024), 145-156.

[392] Mark J. Cherry, 'Foundations of Christian Bioethics: Metaphysical, Conceptual, and Biblical', *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality*, 29.1 (2023), 2. For more on the topic, see David Deane, *The Tyranny of the Banal: On the Renewal of Catholic Moral Theology* (London: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2023).

in the case of 'reasonable' cosmetic surgery. Thirdly, these alterations may be even recommended, particularly in cases such as medical amputation directly aiming to save one's life. Lastly, they may be praised when perceived as expressions of love and altruism, such as in the noble act of organ donation. Drawing from these findings, it has become evident that both Catholic and Orthodox bioethics would classify the two practices in question within the first two categories.

However, one may contemplate the possibility of further developing the Christian moral tradition to encompass tattooing and piercing as recommended or even praiseworthy acts in certain instances. Thus, a question arises: Could Christian ethics, in light of the aforementioned balance between adaptability and stability, find itself recommending such a practice or even considering it worthy of praise, if performed for a noble cause? In terms of the third category, given Christianity's profound concern for the holistic well-being of individuals—embracing bodily as well as mental and sociological dimensions—one might, perhaps reasonably, question why Christian ethics could not recommend the acts of tattooing and piercing in certain circumstances. While recognising that these practices may not offer the direct life-saving potential of a medical amputation, reaching the level of significance inherent in such procedures, if they indeed aim to safeguard, enhance, or restore these aspects of the human person, one could argue that they could be recommended by Christian ethics.

Moreover, although it is undeniable that a tattoo or a piercing does not hold the same level of nobility as the altruistic act of organ donation, it is important to acknowledge that some motivations behind such body modifications can still be deemed noble, albeit to a different degree. For instance, considering Christianity's profound appreciation for artistic creativity, genuine expressions of individuality, and the righteous proclamation of faith, tattoos or piercings obtained for such purposes may indeed carry a sense of nobility. In any case, while current perspectives may not fully embrace the idea of these practices as recommended and praiseworthy acts, the door remains open for future developments in moral evaluation within the Christian moral tradition.

The present dissertation also leaves the door open for further relevant investigation, as there are still several promising avenues for future research to explore. The following areas represent opportunities for scholars to further expand upon the groundwork laid here. Although this study extensively examined the

perspectives of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, it is essential to acknowledge the absence of perspectives from the third major Christian tradition, Protestantism. Thus, future research holds the potential to offer a more comprehensive inter-Christian approach by integrating Protestant theological viewpoints, also keeping in mind that such an endeavour may pose challenges, given the diverse range of Protestant sub-denominations, each potentially having distinct theological viewpoints on the matter. By incorporating the Protestant theological lens, scholars can enrich our understanding of the topic and foster a more inclusive dialogue among Christians.

Even more, while this thesis dealt with body modification in general, it specifically focused on the study cases of tattooing and body piercing. As it is essential to acknowledge that these are just two among a multitude of body modification practices, there is potential for further exploration into other forms of body modification, such as scarification, branding, and cosmetic surgery, among others. By broadening the scope to encompass a wider range of practices, future research can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse ethical dimensions of body modification across different theological traditions.

Finally, the exploration of body modification practices undertaken in this research lays a foundational understanding for further investigation into body enhancement and Transhumanism from a Christian perspective. As previously noted, one could argue that Transhumanism represents the evolution of body modification, with modern progress offering seemingly limitless possibilities for human augmentation. By comprehensively examining the ethical implications of body modification within moral theology, this research paves the way for a more nuanced and well-grounded theological analysis of body enhancement and Transhumanism. Building upon the insights gained from this work, future theological research can delve into the complex intersection of Christian bioethics and the pursuit of enhancing human capabilities and transcending biological limitations.

This interdisciplinary and comparative work has covered many fundamental aspects of Christian ethics and Christian theology, in general, from the creation of human beings to the eschatological fulfilment of human life and from the relationship of humanity with the body to the eventual resurrection of the flesh. This conclusive part of comparing the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions on these aspects showed that, despite the undeniable existence of some significant divergences, the

two also share many important similarities that unite them. Let us hope that works like this one will make them focus on these things that unite them and bring them closer. In the inspiring words of the current head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis,

> How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. To give but one example, in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.[393]

[393] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 246.

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