CHRISTIAN INCARNATION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL DISEMBODIMENT

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Introductory Phenomenological Remarks: Consciousness and Embodiment

In order to withstand the reduction of human existence to either metaphysical dualism or materialist monism, we should return to our lived experience and its phenomenological analysis.[1] The dominance of natural science and its empirical methods has led many to regard the classical distinction between mind and body as obsolete. Terms such as mind, soul, or spirit are now often treated as metaphors for what are considered complex but ultimately material processes of the brain. Yet this shift fails to fully account for the persistence and necessity of concepts like *psyche*, which continue to denote a dimension of human life that is not easily assimilated into purely physical categories. Even within scientific contexts, we speak of psychic and somatic suffering, or of psychosomatic illnesses—indicating that the distinction between body and consciousness, while perhaps ontologically awkward for a materialist worldview, remains experientially unavoidable.

This enduring distinction reflects a basic structure of human existence: namely, that we are beings capable of self-awareness and reflection.

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In becoming conscious of ourselves, we do not merely register bodily sensations; we introduce a distance from our own corporeality. To be aware of one's body implies that consciousness is not identical to it, but operates in a different mode of being. Still, this is not claiming separation in the Cartesian sense. We live both as body and as consciousness, and our existence unfolds within the dynamic interplay of these two dimensions. Phenomenologically, this duality becomes evident in the structure of intentionality: consciousness always transcends the body's immediate physical situation.[2] When I look at a tree, I am perceptually "with" the tree, even though my body remains here; when I think about tomorrow, I am "in" the future, while my body remains in the present. Consciousness thus shows itself as capable of spatial and temporal transcendence, revealing a deeper complexity in our mode of being-in-the-world.

The philosophical temptation has often been to resolve this complexity through reduction. Classical dualism, as found in Plato and Descartes, posits the soul or thinking self as the true seat of personhood, relegating the body to a merely instrumental role. In these frameworks, the soul is immortal and fundamentally distinct from the body, which only serves as its temporary vessel. This dualism strongly influenced strands of Christian theology, despite its tension with the biblical emphasis on the unity of the body and soul. In contrast, modern naturalism tends toward a reductive monism: everything that exists is understood as part of nature and therefore subject to empirical investigation. From this perspective, consciousness is simply brain activity—a highly complex but ultimately explainable process. References to the soul or spirit are thus dismissed as outdated metaphors with no ontological substance.

Phenomenology offers a third way. Rather than beginning with abstract ontological commitments, it begins with the description of experience as it is lived. In this light, no conscious act is ever entirely disembodied. Even abstract thought is rooted in affective, perceptual,

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[2] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 158–161.

and sensory engagement with the world. We always think, feel, speak, and act from within an embodied perspective. This insight is captured in the phenomenological distinction between "I am my body" and "I have a body." On the one hand, the body is the locus of subjectivity: when someone touches my hand, they touch me; when I cry, it is not simply my eyes that produce tears—it is I who cries. The body is not an external appendage but integral to myself. On the other hand, we can also relate to our bodies with a certain detachment: I can observe or describe my body, feel estranged from it when it "falls asleep," or experience disruptions of body-image as in anorexia. Aging may impose limits on my body, and with it, a painful restriction of freedom.

This tension between immediacy and reflection, between embodiment and awareness, marks the body as something more than an object and yet never fully identical with the self. Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" (la *chair*) captures this ambiguity:[3] the body is neither purely subject nor object, but a site of intertwining between self and world. Human existence thus appears as unity-in-difference: we are embodied subjects, already situated in a world, yet capable of stepping back, reflecting, and projecting beyond our physical confines.

Within this framework, the body cannot be reduced to a mere instrument of the self, as instrumentalist interpretations suggest. Rather, it is the necessary *mediator* of our openness to the world.[4] It is only through the body that we perceive, feel, speak, and act. As a mediator, the body does not obscure or stand between the self and the world; rather, it is the condition for any relationship with the world at all. Subjectivity is always expressed and enacted in an embodied way.[5] Likewise, our encounter with another's body is never merely a perception of external form but a direct experience of the other person: they disclose themselves to us through their embodied presence.

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[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 147–148.

[4] Günther Pöltner, *Grundkurs Medizin-Ethik*, 2nd ed. (Wien: Facultas Universitätsverlag, 2006), 63–75.

[5] Thomas Fuchs, "The Circularity of the Embodied Mind," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11, no. 1707 (2020): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01707.

Digital Reduction and Digital "Metaphysics"

Digital culture is shaped by the pervasive influence of technologies rooted in modern scientific thinking. At the heart of this thinking lies a technical-mathematical framework that seeks to reduce all phenomena to quantifiable, computable terms. From this perspective, knowledge is attained by formalizing, measuring, and ultimately controlling nature. Unlike premodern modes of relating to the world—which were grounded in embodied experience, using lived metrics such as steps, fingers, or seasons—modern science replaces this lifeworld orientation with abstract, standardized measurements and technical reasoning.[6] Sensory experience, once central to human understanding, is now viewed with suspicion, eclipsed by the abstract intellect. When science asserts, for instance, that the Earth orbits the Sun—contrary to what our senses suggest—it affirms a new hierarchy of truth: one that privileges calculation over embodied perception.[7]

This elevation of pure reason over sensory-bodily experience is particularly evident in mathematics, which appears to operate independently of any material or corporeal basis. When we grasp that 2 + 3 = 5, we seem to access a realm of truth unmediated by the body—a purely mental, or even spiritual, insight. This was the intuition that led Plato to posit the realm of immaterial ideas or forms, eternal truths untouched by the flux of the physical world. In some respects, these Platonic forms prefigure the contemporary notion of information, which also aspires to immateriality, permanence, and universal intelligibility.[8]

Modern science, especially in its most advanced forms—physics, biology, and computer science—increasingly regards information as the

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[6] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 48–53.

[7] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 116–17.

[8] Luciano Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14–18.

basic fabric of reality. Instead of material atoms, it sees systems of data, codes, and programs. In this shift, some have drawn connections to the ancient *logos*, reinterpreted as the structuring principle of the universe. Martin Heidegger interpreted modern science as a deepening of this metaphysical trajectory, one that further entrenches the supremacy of disembodied, formal knowledge and reduces the world—including the human being—to what can be calculated and controlled.[9]

Digital technology represents the culmination of this movement. It reduces all phenomena to binary code—a sequence of 1s and 0s—thereby transforming them into manipulable data. The Latin word *digitus*, meaning finger, ironically names the system that now abstracts away from bodily experience. Light, sound, and movement—once experienced through the senses—are now stored and processed as digital inscriptions. These inscriptions, while dependent on physical media, present themselves as immaterial information, capable of infinite replication and transmission. Information, in this sense, resembles the Platonic idea: it is abstract and enduring, yet paradoxically tethered to material substrates that it cannot fully escape from.

What emerges is a kind of digital metaphysics, in which the world is understood as fully translatable into information. Information comes to function as a new metaphysical absolute with attributed qualities once reserved for the divine: immateriality, omnipresence, durability, and self-replication.[10] In this context, a new dualism arises—one that reaffirms the mind as the locus of human identity and sees the body as a fragile, inefficient instrument to be optimized or overcome. The ideology of transhumanism builds upon this view, envisioning a future in which the limitations of the body are transcended through technology. Figures such as Ray Kurzweil exemplify this ambition, suggesting that while the body is destined to decay, the mind—conceived as pure information—can be preserved and uploaded to achieve a form of digital

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[9] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 134–35.

[10] Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 41–45.

immortality.[11] Or with the witty remark by Johannes Hepp: "The digital soul does not go to heaven, but to the cloud."[12]

Transforming the Body in Digital Culture

Contrary to the idea that digital culture displaces or diminishes the body, one could argue that it actually intensifies the body's presence, sometimes to the point of fetishization. Yet this apparent valorization of the body does not negate the digital metaphysics previously discussed; rather, it complements it. What we now witness is not the return of the body in its lived, existential fullness, but its transformation into an object of information. The body becomes image, data, a construct shaped by and for the digital gaze.

This gaze—technologically and socially mediated—does not simply observe the biological body but evaluates, categorizes, and aestheticizes it. The objectified body is no longer just a medical or anatomical entity; it is a cultural artifact continually shaped by ideals that circulate as visual and conceptual norms within digital media.[13] These ideals function as templates or informational schemata—standards that we are invited, or compelled, to emulate. As a result, the lived body—the pre-reflective, affective ground of experience[14]—is increasingly subordinated to the task of optimizing its digital representation. Physical training, cosmetic alteration, and even technological enhancement are means by which individuals seek to align their embodied selves with the ideals encoded in the image economy of digital culture.

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[11] Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005), 324–29. For more on the topic of superintelligence, see Bojan Žalec, "Človeški podobna umetna inteligenca in superinteligenca: verjetnost in glavne težave njunega oblikovanja [Human-like Artificial Intelligence and Superintelligence: The Probability and Main Challenges of Their Design]," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 84, no. 4 (2024): 757-758, https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2024/04/Zalec.

[12] Johannes Hepp, *Die Psyche des Homo Digitalis. 21 Neurosen, die uns im 21. Jahrhundert herausfordern*, e-version (München: Kösel, 2022), 244.

[13] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 153–58.

[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 93–95.

This dynamic creates a paradox: while the cultural obsession with the body intensifies, it is not the body as it is lived and experienced that is celebrated, but its representation, its idealized image. The body becomes a project, something to be sculpted for visual validation rather than inhabited as the medium of one's being. Meanwhile, the lived body persists quietly beneath these representations, reminding us of its primacy by fatigue, illness, aging,[15] and the unglamorous rhythms of everyday life. It is in these moments, when the body is no longer compliant or remains in the background, that the limits of the digital image become visible, and the irreducibility of embodied life asserts itself.

Even the most immersive digital experiences depend on this underlying corporeality. Anders Hougaard's concept of *hyperembodiment*[16] captures a related phenomenon: the intensification of sensory input through digital media that seems to enhance our sense of being-in-the-body. Building on Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality,[17] Hougaard suggests that digital experiences do not simply replicate the real—they amplify it, offering stimulations that exceed the natural capacity of our senses. Paradoxically, this can produce a feeling of heightened embodiment that is nonetheless technologically mediated.

This hyperembodiment exists alongside, and perhaps depends upon, a counter-movement of *disembodiment*. As Hubert Dreyfus has argued, digital environments often entail a loss of authentic, situated presence.[18] Online interaction tends to abstract us from the concrete here-and-now, replacing embodied engagement with virtual proximity. A vivid example is internet pornography: while it overwhelms us with visual stimuli, it simultaneously distances the viewer from any reciprocal bodily encounter. The body is thus rendered hyper-stimulated yet absent—intensely addressed but fundamentally displaced. In this tension between amplification and alienation, digital culture reshapes our

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15 Pöltner, *Grundkurs Medizin-Ethik*, 65–67.

16 Anders Hougaard, *Hyperembodiment: Technological Mediation and the Lived Body* (Copenhagen: MedieKultur, 2020), 45–48.

17 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–6.

18 Hubert L. Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3–6, 103–07.

bodily existence in ways that demand renewed reflection on what it means to be an embodied subject.

The Inability to Forget the Body and the Alienation of the Digital Human

Though it may seem that digital immersion leads to bodily detachment, this is ultimately an illusion. The body remains inescapable, even if we can momentarily "forget" it. Moments of deep absorption—being drawn into a film or immersed in music—illustrate consciousness's capacity to direct itself outward, a reflection of its intentional structure. In such states, consciousness is ec-static: it "stands outside" itself by being directed toward something else, spatially or temporally. Yet even in these outward movements, we never fully leave the body. A prereflective self-affection—an awareness of being a bodily self—persists beneath every act of attention.

Intentional consciousness cannot sever itself from embodiment; it is through the body that intention is even possible. The body is not a passive container for consciousness but its enabling condition. It sustains every act of awareness and grounds every experience. Thus, digital life does not free us from the body—it only risks distorting our relation to it. In this distortion lies the danger of alienation: forgetting the lived body that silently anchors our being-in-the-world.

Recognizing embodiment is essential for any authentic human existence. The lived body is the condition of our freedom—it is through the body that we act, speak, and engage with the world. Our sensory and motor capacities make agency possible: as Husserl emphasizes, the body is the original site of the most basic experience of freedom, the prereflective sense of "*I can.*"[19] At the same time, the body is not merely a vehicle for freedom; it also imposes its own demands. It must be cared for, and it unfolds according to a temporality that is distinct from that of consciousness.

While consciousness leaps across time—through memory, anticipation, or the imagination—the body moves according to cyclical,

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[19] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 159–161.

biological rhythms: hunger, fatigue, sleep.[20] These rhythms are embedded in broader natural cycles—the alternation of day and night, and the changing seasons.[21] But alongside these rhythms is a more inescapable trajectory: the body ages. Unlike consciousness, which can envision limitless futures, the body is bound to irreversible time. Aging marks the essential passivity of bodily existence—a passivity that resists mastery, projection, and control.

Aging is thus not merely biological but existential. It reminds us, again and again, of our fragility and finitude. However far we extend our thoughts or aspirations, we remain tethered to the slow, intractable unfolding of embodied time. The body ages without our consent, revealing the limits of will and the irreducibility of our bodily being.

Just as the body cannot be replaced, neither can the *lifeworld*—the pre-reflective world of lived experience.[22] The lifeworld precedes all scientific models and digital constructions. It is not one viewpoint among others but the grounding horizon from which all perspectives arise. Unlike curated digital realities—social media personas, algorithmically tailored feeds, or performative spaces like reality television—the lifeworld is not constructed or chosen. It is given. We cannot opt out of it; we are immersed in it from the start, bodily and affectively.

We may model, interpret, and represent the world in various ways, but first and foremost, we live it. Likewise, before we project, modify, or curate our bodily image, we inhabit our body from within. This inner, affective life cannot be entirely shaped or controlled. Feeling exemplifies this passivity. Unlike thought, which we direct, feelings arise—they happen to us. While we may regulate or conceal our emotions, we do not generate them at will. Modern culture's attempt to control feeling—through substances, technologies, and affective optimization—only deepens the tension between the unruly givenness of the body and the ideal of self-mastery.

This tension gives rise to a distinctive form of *body alienation* in digital culture. Two main dimensions can be identified. First, alienation

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[20] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 82–84.

[21] Thomas Fuchs, "The Cyclical Time of the Body and Its Relation to Linear Time," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25, no. 7–8 (2018): 48.

[22] Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 103–104.

arises from the *idealization of the body*. Rather than accepting ourselves as we are—bodily beings with particular limitations and textures of experience—we come to identify with idealized, digitally mediated images. These representations, circulated throughout visual economies, are imposed back onto the lived body, which increasingly appears inadequate in comparison to its curated reflection.

Second, alienation stems from the *digital colonization of the lifeworld*. As more of our experience shifts into mediated environments—screens, interfaces, and abstract representations—our embodied engagement with the physical world recedes. The body becomes sedentary, passive, and stationary. It is reduced to a perceptual substrate rather than a dynamic, world-involving agent. In contrast to the apparent fluidity and "freedom" of digital movement, the body begins to feel like an obstacle, an inconvenient remainder of our animal condition.

This alienation echoes a much older philosophical suspicion of the body. In *Phaedo*, Plato portrays the body (*sōma*) as a prison (*sēma*) of the soul.[23] This dualism resurfaces in transhumanist aspirations to transcend the body—through enhancement, digitization, or mind-uploading—as if liberation lies in abandoning our corporeal condition.[24] However, such visions do not resolve body alienation; they culminate it. They represent the ultimate forgetting of the lived body as the very ground of thought, experience, and freedom itself.

The Christian Message of Incarnation: Embodiment, Redemption, and Human Fulfillment

While Paul's theology often contrasts life according to the flesh (*sarx, caro*) with life according to the spirit (*pneuma, spiritus*), he also affirms the integral value of the human body. He declares the body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and maintains that salvation not only includes the soul but also the glorified body of the believer. Despite

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[23] Plato, "*Phaedo* 82e–84b," in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 72–73.

[24] Ivan Platovnjak and Tone Svetelj, "Technology as the Elixir of Immortality. Resurgent Philosophical and Spiritual Enigma of Human Imprisonment," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 83, no. 4 (2023): 977, https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2023/04/Platovnjak.

employing a dualistic vocabulary, Paul—rooted in the anthropological vision of the Hebrew Scriptures—does not endorse the radical body-soul dualism characteristic of Greek philosophical thought, particularly in its Platonic form. This is evident in the mockery he receives at the Areopagus (Acts 17:32), where his proclamation of bodily resurrection directly challenges the Greek assumption that true salvation entails liberation from the body, not its redemption.

Yet throughout Christian history, elements of Greek metaphysics have shaped theological developments, sometimes distorting the biblical vision. These influences have contributed to persistent ambivalence or even negativity toward the body, often driven by moral concerns and attempts to regulate biological drives—especially sexuality. However, it would be equally misguided to interpret the Christian view of the body as analogous to modern corporeal glorification or as aligned with the contemporary suspicion of metaphysics.

Christianity assigns a central place to the body, but within a radically different horizon from that of secular modernity. Its significance does not lie in aesthetic idealization, consumerist display, or technological enhancement. Nor is it reduced to biological determinism or cultural construction. Rather, the body's meaning is grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation—the belief that, in Jesus Christ, God became fully human, assuming not just a human soul or mind but a human body. In this decisive event of Christian faith, the body is not opposed to the divine, nor merely tolerated by it; it becomes the very locus of divine self-revelation, redemption, and entrance into material existence.

Biblical Anthropology and the Body: From Jewish Roots to Christian Horizons

While Greek philosophy begins with the cosmos and derives the nature of the human from its rational harmony, the biblical-Jewish tradition begins with God—a God who precedes the world, who freely creates it, and who addresses the human being. This divine word does not constitute the human as a purely rational or spiritual entity but as a unity of body and spirit, formed from the earth and animated by the breath of God. There is no metaphysical dualism here: the human is

not a soul trapped in a body, but a whole being, brought into existence by divine will.

The law (*Torah*) revealed to this embodied being is not a cosmic principle or system of rational order but a personal address—a guide to living that is intrinsically relational. It not only governs the vertical relationship with God but also the horizontal relationship with other human beings. Biblical ethics thus does not abstract the human from flesh but situates embodiment within a concrete ethical vocation. The human being is always a being-in-relation, and this relationality is profoundly corporeal.[25]

The neighbor is not encountered as an abstract soul or rational subject, but in their vulnerable bodily presence. The Hebrew Scriptures consistently call for care for the most physically exposed: the widow, the orphan, the stranger. These are not categories but concrete bodies in need of nourishment, shelter, and protection. Ethical responsibility thus unfolds through bodily acts: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty. The body's deepest significance lies in its capacity to serve, to give, to respond.

From this perspective, embodiment finds meaning not in autonomy or aesthetic perfection but in being for the other. The body becomes the medium of divine love. This relational anthropology reaches its radical culmination in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, in which God becomes not merely a spiritual principle but a body—born, vulnerable, suffering, and ultimately glorified. In this glorification, Christianity not only affirms the spiritual dignity of the human being but the enduring, eschatological value of the body itself.

The Christian claim was so profound that it redefined the Jewish religious imagination: the God of Israel had become human in the person of Jesus Christ. This claim did not abolish Judaism but radicalized it. *Verbum caro factum est* ("the Word became flesh," Jn 1:14) is not a metaphor but a literal and ontological statement. In Christ, the transcendent God who had spoken to Abraham and the prophets entered the materiality—the *flesh* (*sarx*)—of human existence and became subject

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[25] Erwin Dirscherl, *Grundriss Theologischer Anthropologie. Die Entschiedenheit des Menschen angesichts des Anderen* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2006), 61.

to vulnerability, time, and sensory limitations. In this act, Christianity bridges what had remained an unbridgeable divide in both Jewish and Greek thought: the ontological chasm between God and humanity.[26] For Judaism, the gap reflected divine holiness; for Greek metaphysics, it lay between the eternal and the perishable. Christianity proclaims that this divide is traversed in Christ. God "takes form" in Christ, where *form* is to be understood in Balthasar's sense of *Gestalt*: "The Incarnation uses created Being at a new depth as a language and a means of expression for the divine Being and essence."[27]

The resurrection further reinforces this claim: it is not the survival of a disembodied soul, but the restoration of the whole person[28]—spirit and flesh united. Eternal life is not envisioned as pure intellectual self-contemplation (*noēsis noēseōs*) or the speculative unfolding of spirit. Rather, salvation embraces the flesh—that is, the inward, lived dimension of the body, which phenomenology carefully distinguishes from the body as a mere physical object. The promise of bodily resurrection affirms the fullness of embodied personhood, now transfigured to share in divine glory.

Yet even in Christ's glorified body, the body is not an end in itself. Jesus not only had flesh; he gave his flesh. His body was given, broken, shared—culminating in the Eucharist, the sacrament of a body offered *for you.* This act discloses the body's deepest theological and anthropological truth: it is not a possession or object of self-fulfillment, nor a concept to be understood. The body is a vocation. As Emmanuel Levinas suggests, it is a call for responsibility and an ethical relationship with the Other.[29]

This vocation emerges not from objectifying the body but from its lived dimension—flesh as felt from within, as the site of emotion, vulnerability, and responsiveness. Even reason and thought are embodied: they do not arise in detachment from the world but through bodily

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[26] James Mensch, "Transcendence and Intertwining," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 77 (2017) 3/4: 485–486.

[27] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 29.

[28] Joseph Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, 9th ed. (München: Kösel, 2007), 331–332.

[29] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 187–201.

feeling, mood, and presence. What we call "spiritual" or "immaterial"—a word of consolation, an act of love—always takes an embodied form. Words are spoken with the voice, written by the hand, and carried by the breath and gesture. In this sense, the Christian vision does not negate the body but integrates it into the highest expressions of love, meaning, and divine communion.

Embodied Fullness: The Christian Vision of Life in a Disembodied Age

The Christian understanding of salvation—like Jesus' proclamation of the "Kingdom of God"—makes the radical claim that it offers the fullness of life that every human being ultimately seeks. This is not life merely prolonged or intensified in pleasure, but life fulfilled in its deepest human dimension. Crucially, this eschatological fullness encompasses the whole person, including the embodied self. It is on this integral vision of humanity that Christianity grounds its universal relevance: it speaks to the soul and the body, to the entire human being in search of meaning.

This vision offers a compelling counter-narrative to the dominant tendencies in contemporary digital culture. Christianity does not respond with nostalgia or moral panic, but by affirming the body's irreducible role in a meaningful life. It resists two prevalent reductive trajectories: transhumanism, which seeks to overcome the body as a technical limit, and posthumanism, which dissolves the human into the flux of material nature, denying any unique spiritual vocation. The former reintroduces a dualism that devalues embodiment; the latter erases the distinctiveness of the human altogether.

In both, the body is either a problem to solve or a contingent accident. While such views may promise optimization or enhancement, they struggle to articulate what it means to live *fully*—to live a life marked by meaning, love, and relation. Yet these reductive frameworks are becoming increasingly normative within digital culture.[30]

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[30] Stjepan Štivić, "Upanje v krščanstvu in transhumanizem [Hope in Christianity and Transhumanism]," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 81, no. 4 (2021): 855, https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2021/04/Stivic.

The erosion of embodied life is now widely recognized. The question is how to respond—how to recover or reimagine the fullness of life amid digital mediation. One common response is to reclaim the body, but this too often takes the form of self-referential optimization. The body becomes a curated site of experiences—tracked, aestheticized, and broadcast. A visit to a trending location, for instance, may be driven less by the intrinsic richness of the experience than by the imperative to *embody* what others are virtually displaying—feeding a fear of missing out rather than fulfilling a longing for real presence.

Such a pursuit of embodiment, while understandable, can easily be co-opted by consumerist logic. The body becomes a platform for accumulating experiences, rather than a site of ethical relation or transcendence. This logic also shapes intimate relationships, where digitally mediated ideals lead individuals to seek encounters not for their intrinsic value, but to match a cultural script of what love or intimacy should look like. Even care for bodily health—such as screen fatigue awareness—can become another expression of the fear that one's body may fall short of digital-age ideals.

In all of this, the body is either overexposed or overburdened—treated as a project to manage or a limit to transcend. What is missing is a vision of the body as *given*, as relational, as the ground of being-for-others. Christianity, through the Incarnation and resurrection, offers precisely such a vision.[31] It affirms the body not as an object to be mastered or a source of alienation, but as the site of personal existence, of communion, of love. The fullness of life, in this view, is not achieved apart from the body but through its transformation in love and hope.

This vision provides a criterion for discernment in our digital age. The fullness of life is not a solitary ideal but unfolds in relationships—rooted in the personal nature of God. God is not an impersonal force but a relational being, and human relationships mirror this divine structure. Authentic human connection cannot be replaced by interaction with devices or artificial agents, no matter how advanced. The body finds its meaning in this relational context.

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[31] Josef Wohlmuth, *Die Tora spricht die Sprache des Menschen. Theologische Aufsätze und Meditationen zur Beziehung von Judentum und Christentum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002), 41.

To return to the body, then, is not merely to reject digital mediation or to reclaim physical health—it is to return to *embodied relationality*, to the ways we live with and for others. Even in digital exchange, we intuitively assume the other's bodily presence—their voice, face, and gestures. Every real conversation presupposes the other's embodied being.

Yet digital mediation can risk reduction, turning the other into a projection or function. The person becomes a stimulus for satisfaction rather than a presence to be encountered. This instrumentalization stands in stark contrast to the Christian understanding of embodiment as a vocation to communion.

Still, the digital is not inherently alienating. It can support and deepen embodied relationships when used in service to them. Modern communication allows us to maintain presence with loved ones across vast distances, to see and hear them, to share moments. Even when mediated, such encounters bear the trace of real presence, of longing for proximity and touch. The desire to see a smile, to recognize a gesture, affirms that even digital interactions remain haunted by the hope of physical nearness.

Here, the sense of touch is particularly revealing. As phenomenologists like Husserl emphasize, touch is uniquely reciprocal: to touch is also to be touched. One can look without being seen, speak without being heard—but one cannot touch without entering into mutual presence.[32] Touch is the paradigmatic expression of embodied reciprocity and vulnerability. In a world increasingly defined by simulation, the irreducibility of touch reminds us of what cannot be digitized: the radical nearness of another's flesh.

Christianity thus invites us not to reject the digital world but to inhabit it differently—to remain attuned to the bodily, the relational, and the transcendent.[33] The Christian vision of embodiment is not about negating the body, nor escaping from it, but allowing it to become the medium through which love, relation, and divine

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[32] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 158.

[33] Branko Klun, "Problem religioznega izkustva v digitalno transformiranem svetu. Eksistencialno fenomenološki pristop [The Problem of Religious Experience in a Digitally Transformed World. An Existential-Phenomenological Approach]," Bogoslovni vestnik 84, no. 1 (2024): 31, https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2024/01/Klun.

communion are realized. Salvation is not the body's erasure, but its transfiguration in communion.

Conclusion

Christianity offers a transcendent message: the ultimate meaning of myself and my body—which I both *am* and *have*—is not found in self-enclosure, but in self-transcendence: in going out of myself toward the other. This movement of transcendence unfolds within interpersonal relationships, where the body becomes the medium of a gift, and love is fulfilled in the logic of giving.

It begins with the recognition that I have not brought myself into being. I have received myself—my embodied self, my particular body—from a personal God who wills me into existence, who desires me as I am, and who affirms me at the deepest level. In a culture saturated with comparisons and ideals, I may be tempted to judge my body as insufficient, to envy the gifts others seem to have received. Yet this perspective can be transformed. Rather than fixating on what I lack, I can learn to focus on what has been given—to what I can do and be through the body entrusted to me. My body is no longer measured against an abstract ideal of perfection; it is seen instead in light of the radical possibility that it might not have existed at all. Compared to nothingness, everything is a surplus. Seen in this light—as a gift that need not have existed but does—my body awakens a new kind of gratitude, one that embraces even its limitations, because they too belong to what has been given.

From this gratitude arises a deeper realization: that my body, even in its weakness or imperfection, is not only something to receive, but something to offer. What I have been given becomes the very capacity through which I give myself to others. A glance, a gesture, a word spoken in kindness—these are not abstract acts but bodily ones. Through them, I offer my embodied self, and in this giving, my body finds its fullest meaning: it becomes a body *for the other*.

Such a way of living requires faith. The dominant voice of contemporary culture often insists that the body is ours alone, that it must be secured, enhanced, and optimized for our own purposes. The body is

viewed as a possession to protect, not as a gift to share. Yet the Christian vision tells another story. It calls on us to trust that in giving ourselves, we do not lose our lives, but bear fruit. Like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground, the body fulfills itself not by preserving its own life, but by offering it in love.

This faith unveils the paradox at the heart of Christian hope: what appears to be loss is the path to fullness, and only in the gift of the embodied self can we find life in abundance. In this light, embodiment is not a burden to escape from nor an object to idolize, but a sacred vocation—a path through which we learn to love and to be loved, in the flesh.

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