

## Human Bodily Movement and Spirituality

Ivan Platovnjak\*

[ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si](mailto:ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7779-0889>

Vinko Zovko\*\*

[Vinko.zovko@ef.uni-lj.si](mailto:Vinko.zovko@ef.uni-lj.si)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5269-3139>

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*Movement is a reality that is linked to all dimensions of human life and action. People move in different ways and for different purposes. Various studies confirm that regular physical activity has a positive effect on a person's overall health. In this article, the authors examine the connection between a person's bodily movement and his or her spirituality. In four chapters, they reinforce the thesis that human beings move not only physically but also spiritually, and that their bodily movement enables them to live a more integrated spiritual life. In the first chapter, they briefly introduce movement as a fundamental reality of human life. In the second chapter they define spirituality, which should always be alive and also embodied in movement. In the third chapter, they describe Christian spirituality lived out in various forms of human bodily movement, limiting themselves to three basic ones: Walking, running, and dancing. As there is often a lack of connection between theory and practise, the last chapter briefly shows how to draw attention to bodily movement such that it has a greater influence on spiritual life.*

Key words: *Bodily Movement, Dancing, Prayer, Running, Spirituality, Walking, Mindfulness.*

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\* Ivan Platovnjak, PhD, Assis. Prof., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology; Address: Poljanska cesta 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

\*\* Vinko Zovko, Mag, Sen. Lecturer, University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business; Address: Kardeljeva ploščad 17, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

## *Introduction*\*\*\*

Movement is a reality that is present in human beings' everyday life and is inevitably linked to all dimensions of their life and action. To move, to run, to walk is to live. Movement is at the heart of everything that exists. This law applies to both inanimate and animate nature. It connects human beings with all other forms of life on earth. Plants, animals and people are constantly moving, each according to its own nature.

Humans move in different ways and for different purposes. Physical movement takes the form of body movement, e.g. walking, running, dancing, swimming, climbing, physical exercises, etc. Since ancient times, when Hippocrates warned that a proper diet would not keep a person healthy, it has been known that regular physical exercise has a positive impact on a person's physical and mental health.<sup>1</sup> Various studies have confirmed the positive impact of a person's physical movement on overall health<sup>2</sup>, cognitive function, well-being and quality of life.<sup>3</sup>

In the present paper, we will explore the connection between human bodily movement and spirituality. In four chapters, we aim to confirm the thesis that human beings move not only physically but also spiritually, and that bodily movement enables them to live a more integral spiritual life. In the first chapter we will briefly introduce movement as a fundamental reality of human life. In the second, we will define spirituality, which is to be always alive and embodied also in movement. Since there are many different spiritualities, we will limit ourselves to Christianity. In the third chapter of all forms of bodily movement, we will limit ourselves to three basic ones: walking, running, and dancing. Although this is a scientific article, we believe it is also necessary to show the link between theory and practise. Therefore, in the last chapter we will briefly show how to put into practise attention to bodily movement so that it has a greater impact on the spiritual life.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jack W. BERRYMAN, Exercise is medicine: a historical perspective, *Current sports medicine reports*, 9 (2010) 4, 195-201.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Berislav ČOVIĆ, On Contemporary Sport as a Humanistic Value Through a Bioethical Approach, *Pannoniana*, 5 (2021) 1, 9-30.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ross ARENA et al., Let us talk about moving: reframing the exercise and physical activity discussion, *Current problems in cardiology*, 43 (2018) 4, 154-179.

## 1. Movement – the fundamental reality of human life

Movement is at the heart of everything that exists. This law applies to both inanimate and animate nature. For this reason, all living things in particular defend from stillness because they feel that it means death.<sup>4</sup> Movement connects human beings with all other forms of life on earth. Plants, animals and humans are constantly in movement, each according to its own nature. The force of gravity pulls everything towards the centre of the earth, but animals and human beings overcome gravity by moving. Through a balanced alternation of opposition and submission to gravity, life force is created.<sup>5</sup>

Movement encompasses the human body as a whole, as the whole body participates in moving the individual parts with all its energy, rhythm of breathing and coordination of balance.<sup>6</sup> A particular exercise may target only a specific part of the body, but the whole body is involved. A person's movement is also influenced by how he or she feels.<sup>7</sup> When he or she feels unwell, they move slowly and awkwardly. When he or she is feeling well, their movements are more relaxed and lively. Of course, movement itself also affects the balance between mind and body.<sup>8</sup>

Technological and social developments in recent decades have led to major lifestyle changes.<sup>9</sup> Compared to our parents' or grandparents' generations, for whom physical activity, from hard work to transport, was part of everyday life, today's environment not only reduces the need for such physical activity, but even requires or encourages prolonged periods of sitting. As a consequence, people's energy expenditure and physical performance are decreasing.<sup>10</sup> This represents the level of movement abilities that allows people to be physically autonomous and creative in their daily lives, and is also closely linked to their health.<sup>11</sup>

Physical immobility is nowadays one of the leading causes of early mortality of people, which is also due to changing lifestyles that have a strong impact on

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Meta ZAGORC, *Ples – ustvarjanje z gibom* [Dance – Creating with Movement], Ljubljana, Fakulteta za šport, 1992, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mojca VOGELNIK, *Tehnika gibanja v plesu: priručnik plesne tehnike* [Movement Technique in Dance: A Handbook of Dance Technique], Ljubljana, Zveza kulturnih organizacij Slovenije, 1994, 12-16.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Maja VERČKO, *Balet in šolski uspeh* [Ballet and School Success], Diplomsko delo, Univerza v Ljubljani, Teološka fakulteta, 2015, 2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Juan F. FRRANCK, The Person at the Core of Psychological Science, *Scientia et Fides*, 9 (2021) 2, 15-33, doi: 10.12775/SetF.2021.016Franck.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Vogelnik, *Ples – ustvarjanje...*, 4-7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. David KRANER, Media Representations Reflect the Problem of the Institutionalization of the Church, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 81 (2021) 1, 163-183.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mark Stephen TREMBLAY et al., Physiological and health implications of a sedentary lifestyle, *Applied physiology, nutrition, and metabolism*, 35 (2010) 6, 725-740.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Francisco B. ORTEGA et al., Physical fitness in childhood and adolescence: a powerful marker of health, *International journal of obesity*, 32 (2008) 1, 1-11.

physical activity, and consequently on physical performance and diseases related to lack of movement.<sup>12</sup> Independent of bodily activity, sedentary lifestyles also have an impact on the increase in overweight, certain cancers and chronic non-communicable diseases, including the risk of coronary artery disease.<sup>13</sup>

People instinctively seek movement because it relaxes muscular and mental tension, most of which is caused by the stressful and fast pace of life. In fact, movement is essential for human beings as it contributes to biopsychosocial balance and proper growth and development.<sup>14</sup>

Children and adults alike show their moods: joy and sadness, passion and pain, and the experience of emotions by responding with movement: jumping, waving arms, clapping hands, shaking heads, etc. For all, movement is a source of pleasure and a release of both muscular and mental tension, and it allows for inner balance.<sup>15</sup>

Research confirms that mindful walking (Mindfulness) effectively improves physical symptoms and psychological well-being in both persons with physical and mental illnesses (e.g. heart disease, cancer, depression) and healthy persons who are under stress.<sup>16</sup>

People have a need for freedom of movement. It is important to find a way that allows them not to become stagnant or just to move restlessly. However, movement is not limited to the physical. Movement is also important to the spiritual life. Bodily movement makes the spiritual possible. In addition, various studies show that intensive participation in meaningful, long-term and repetitive activities, such as a walking pilgrimage, deepens the sense of spirituality.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. James F. SALLIS, Judith J. PROCHASKA, Wendell C. TAYLOR, A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents, *Medicine and science in sports and exercise*, 32 (2000) 5, 963-975.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. David G. BATTY; I-Min LEE, Physical activity and coronary heart disease, *Journals BMJ*, 328 (2004), 1089-1090; Erik SIGMUND et al., Trends and correlates of overweight/obesity in Czech adolescents in relation to family socioeconomic status over a 12-year study period (2002–2014), *BMC Public Health*, 18 (2018) 1, 1-11.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Meta ZAGORC, *Ples v sodobni šoli: prvo triletje I* [Dance in the Modern School: The First Three Years I], Ljubljana, Fakulteta za šport, Inštitut za šport, 2006, 8-11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 9-12.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mihael TEUT et al., Mindful walking in psychologically distressed individuals: A randomized controlled trial, *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2013, <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2013/489856/> (3.12.2022).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Snežana BRUMEC, Nikolaj ARACKI ROSENFELD, A comparison of Life Changes After the Pilgrimage and Near-Death Experiences, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 81 (2021) 3, 695-710; Snežana BRUMEC, Life changes after the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, including a deeper sense of spirituality, *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*, 12 (2022), 20-35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2022.2042948>.

## 2. Living and incarnate Spirituality

The word »spirituality« comes from the Latin word *spiritualitas*, which is linked to the adjective *spiritualis* (spiritual). This is derived from the Greek *pneuma* (spirit) and the adjective *pneumatikos*, as we see in Paul's letters in the New Testament. It is important to note that »spirit« and »spiritual« are not opposed to »physical« or »material« reality, but to »flesh« (Greek *sarx*, Latin *caro*), that is, to anything that is opposed to the acknowledgement and consideration of the work of the Spirit of God.<sup>18</sup> There is no opposition between the spirit and the body, but between two attitudes towards life. The dualism between the »spiritual« and the »physical«, or between soul and body, in no way derives from Paul's understanding of the human person or of all created things.<sup>19</sup>

The Bible, on which the Christian understanding of man and his body is based, says that God created man from the earth and breathed into him his Spirit (cf. Gen 2:7). In the same way, the Bible also tells us that God created man in His own image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:27).<sup>20</sup> Man is not only the image of God in his spirit, but also in his corporeality. Therefore, he is not a spiritual being because he has renounced his body, but because his body is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and is, as the apostle Paul points out (cf. 1 Cor 6:19), His temple. It is for this reason that man can and must glorify God in his body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20), and make Him present in all his actions.

According to the teaching of the Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Cor 2:14-15; Rom 8), spirituality means living by, with, and in the Holy Spirit. At the centre of Christian spirituality, then, is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God the Father and of God the Son, Jesus Christ, who becomes visibly active through the life of the concrete person, that is, through his or her body and all of his or her activities, including his or her movements.

<sup>18</sup> »For the Corinthians, the separation between the spiritual (*πνευματικός*) and the fleshly (*σάρκινο*) (1 Cor 3:1) is fatal, since such thinking ultimately results in their slogan 'all things are lawful' (10:23), and, finally, in their 'liberty' (*ἐξουσία*) to attend temple feasts (8-9)« [Samo SKRALOVNIK, Maksimilijan MATJAŽ, The Old Testament Background of 'Desire' in 1 Cor 10:6, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 80 (2020) 3, 505-518, 514].

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Philip SHELDRAKE, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, Mandeln, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 17; *Ibid.*, *Spirituality. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, University Press, 2012, 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Roman GLOBOKAR, Krščanski antropocentrizem in izkoriščevalska drža človeka do naravnega okolja [Christian Anthropocentrism and Man's Exploitative Stance toward the Natural Environment], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 78 (2018) 2, 349-364, 357-361; Mateja PEVEC ROZMAN, Oseba in dialog: medsebojnost (»das Zwischen«) kot ontološki temelj dialoga pri Martinu Bubru [Person and the Dialogue: Between (»das Zwischen«) as an Ontological Foundation at Martin Buber's Dialogue], *Edinost in dialog*, 76 (2021) 2, 15-32, 17. The biblical author explicitly emphasises in the creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4) that God created man in his own image« (1:26-27). He emphasises this four times, which means that he considers it very important [cf. Samo SKRALOVNIK, Jakob Aleksič: Man's Calling to Dialogue, *Edinost in dialog*, 76 (2021) 1, 119-140, 124].

Cardinal Walter Kasper describes Christian spirituality as the fruit of the collaboration (conscious or unconscious, active or passive) of two agents. The first agent is »from above«: it is the Holy Spirit. He is, in fact, its foundation and source. Without Him, Christian spirituality is not possible at all. He is unchanging and always the same, but at the same time He gives different inspirations, gifts, charisms, and missions, as the Apostle Paul explains (cf. 1 Cor 12-14). The second agent of spirituality is »from below«. It is the Christian who is marked by his or her creation, corporeality and psyche, human and God-likeness, sinfulness and holiness, freedom and slavery, faith and unfaith, abilities and limitations, etc. At the same time, he or she is also deeply embedded in and dependent on the time and the environment in which he or she lives and works, as well as on the social, cultural and ecclesial life of the Church. All of this greatly influences his or her response to the action of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, to the realisation of the spirituality that he or she lives and co-forms in his or her own time and place.<sup>21</sup>

In short, Christian spirituality is the Christian faith lived in the power and under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ and of the Father in union with brothers and sisters in the communion of the Church in the midst of a concrete community, environment, society, nation and world. This is the concrete life of the Christian in all its dimensions of body, psyche and spirit within the various communities to which he or she belongs and in which he or she lives and works.

In a broader sense, spirituality is a way of life that enables a person to seek and find the content, purpose and meaning of life and answers to life's deepest questions. Walking this path leads one to an integral relationship with oneself, others, creation and transcendence, and the Absolute, which for believers is God. Religious people find spirituality understood in this way within their religion and so live a religious spirituality. Non-religious people, on the other hand, find such spirituality within the values they profess, the various philosophical schools, cosmologies, psychologies, arts, etc. They live a so-called secular spirituality.<sup>22</sup>

Spirituality, however, is not static but very dynamic, like life itself and the whole universe. Everything moves, including the human spirit and the Spirit of God. According to the Gospel of John (3:8), Jesus Christ especially encourages his disciples to allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to move and act whenever and wherever He wills.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Walter KASPER, *L'Ecumenismo spirituale* (07.12.2007), <http://dimensionesperanza.it/ecumenismo/item/3854-1-ecumenismo-spirituale-walter-kasper-.html> (6.12.2022).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Meeting the spiritual needs of a dying person, *Nova prisutnost*, 20 (2022) 1, 57-72, 59-62.

### *3. Christian spirituality lived within different forms of human bodily movement*

In the light of the Scripture, everything is a gift from God, including every movement. Jesus said that the sun and the rain do not work by themselves, but that God the Father gives His sun to rise and sends the rain (cf. Mt 5:45). In the light of this teaching of His, we can also see the work of God the Father in the movement of the whole universe and of every human body. He gives everybody the ability to move. Of course, man is free and can consciously move in the Holy Spirit, expressing, realising and embodying Him and bringing His fruit through movement to those around him and to the whole world: »love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control« (Gal 5:22-23).<sup>23</sup> But he or she can resist this and move in another spirit that brings hatred, sorrow, restlessness, irritability, hardness, wickedness, unfaithfulness, licentiousness, etc. (cf. Gal 5:19-21).

Let us look at some forms of human bodily movement and how these can embody Christian spirituality and enable a person to live more fully their God-image (Gen 1:26) and their (spiritual) life (cf. Jn 10:10).

#### *3.1 Walking*

From the Gospels we can see that Jesus walked, wandered and crossed a lot. »Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people« (Mt 4:23). »They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way« (Mr 10:32). »After this, Jesus went around in Galilee« (Jn 7:1). When He chose someone to be His disciple, He called him to follow Him (cf. Mt 8:22; 9:9).

To follow Jesus in the Gospel meant to be a disciple of Jesus. To walk in these cases meant concretely to walk with Jesus, to go from place to place, but also to imitate Jesus' way of life. Thus, the Apostle Paul urged all Christians to imitate Jesus Christ and live by his Spirit (cf. Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6).

Indeed, throughout Scripture, the noun "walk" and the verb "to walk" are used literally and figuratively to refer to living with God according to His law and in His Spirit. The one who follows God and walks with Him is the one who keeps God's laws (cf. Deut 5:33; 28:9; Josh 22:5; Ps 1; Jer 7:23). That Enoch (cf. Gen 5:24) and Noah (cf. Gen 6:9) »walked with God« means that they acted in accordance with the will of their God, demonstrating their faith in Him

<sup>23</sup> All biblical quotations are from the *Bible: New International Version* (NIV), <https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-International-Version-NIV-Bible> (01.12.2022).

and their awareness of His presence and activity through public and personal devotion.<sup>24</sup>

In many places in the Old and New Testaments we read how God promises to walk with His people (e.g. Levit 26:12; Deut 5:33; 10:12; Jer 7:23; Ps 89:15; 119:105; Mt 28:20; Col 2:6; 1 Jn 1:7) Those who accept His walk with them also walk with Him and become like Him: »But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light ...« (1 Jn 1:7). »So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh» (Gal 5:16).

»Walking in the light« (cf. 1 Jn 2:10) means being holy and living the law of freedom and love and being happy. »Walking in faith« (cf. 2 Cor 5:7) means expecting the promised goods and acting on that faith. »Walking in the Spirit« (cf. Rom 8) means living in Christ and seeing, understanding, deciding and acting in His way, according to the Gospel and its values. »To walk in darkness« (cf. 1 John 1:6) is to be faithless and fall into error. »To walk in the flesh« (cf. Gal 5:13) means to indulge in evil and sin.<sup>25</sup>

To walk, however, in Scripture means not only to advance at a steady pace, but also to increase a moderate pace until it becomes a rapid pace. Of course, this is not an expression of one's own strength, but of trust in the Lord (cf. Is 40:30-31).

Walking and surrendering to the rhythm of our steps can help us to be in the present moment. In this way we redirect our minds to be aware of what is happening in the here and now and to be in the presence of the Triune God in whom we live, move and have our being (cf. Acts 17:28). Becoming one with the rhythm of walking enables what God wants to give us to happen in us by walking in and with Him. In this way we learn by experience<sup>26</sup> how important it is to find the rhythm that the Spirit of the Father and of Christ puts into everything we live and do. In this way we can share in the fruit of the Spirit and also in the rest promised to all who come to Christ (cf. Mt 11:28).<sup>27</sup>

Walking teaches us that we cannot achieve anything new unless we are willing to leave the old behind. It is not possible to take a step forward unless we leave where we were and take a step forward. As we walk, the awareness can arise in us that God the Father, through Christ, always gives us the possibility of a new step, of a new life in him and with him. Christians understand our faith as following Jesus Christ, who is »the way, the truth and the life« (Jn 14:6).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. James STRONG, John McCLINTOCK, Walk, in: *ibid.* (ed), *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, New York, Haper and Brothers, 1880, <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/W/walk.html> (02.12.2022).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Irena AVSENIK NABERGOJ, Od religioznega izkustva do duhovne literature Svetega pisma [From Religious Experience to the Spiritual Literature of the Bible], *Edinost in dialog*, 74 (2019) 1, 213-237.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Rest in God – The Spirituality of Rest, *Edinost in dialog*, 77 (2022) 1, 259-277, 264-268, doi: 10.34291/Edinost/77/01/Platovnjak.



He calls us to follow Him as His disciples (e.g. Mt 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21). Following him means living out our faith in this world, but the final destination is in heaven.<sup>28</sup> Walking or living on earth is only temporary. In this sense, we Christians are understood as »pilgrims« who wander through this world on the way to our true home with God (cf. Jn 14:1-5).

So as we walk, we can discover how wonderful it is to have a body and a way and to be able to walk on it. Just as life is a way, so too - and in a special way - is the spiritual life a way.

Walking is the most natural and intrinsic human condition and essential for healing. Walking is anti-depressive and has an effect not only on physical well-being but also on psychological well-being. If we only sit and are still, thoughts only circle in our head. Walking, on the other hand, frees the mind and gets it flowing. It gives our mind and spirit a rest and strengthens them.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.2 Running (*long-distance running*)

The Bible often speaks of running. God is presented as a Father who runs to each person as to His own son to reveal His Fatherly love (cf. Lk 15:19). God's love for a person does not depend on his or her will or effort, but on God Himself (cf. Rom 9:15-17). The apostle Paul says of himself, »However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace« (Acts 20:24). The Old Testament worshipper promises God that he will »run in the path« of His commandments because He Himself will enable him to do so (Ps 119:32-33).

Every Christian is called by baptism to run his or her Christian life in the spirit of the Gospel, knowing that this requires of him or her an effort similar to that of those who run on a racecourse (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-25). Therefore, he or she must not run his or her life »blindly« (1 Cor 9:26), so as to run into the void (cf. Gal 2:2), but consciously, knowing that he or she is »running towards the goal to win the prize« (Phil 3:14) to which God in Christ Jesus calls him or her from above. Thus, at the end of life, he or she will be able to say with Paul, »I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith« (2 Tim 4:7).

In the Bible, the one who runs is the one who wants to tell others the good news as quickly as possible (cf. Gen 24:29; 29:12; Judg 13:10; 2 Sam 18:27) or to discover the truth (cf. Jn 20:4; Mk 9:25). But, of course, a person cannot run out of his or her own power. »The power of the Lord came on Elijah, and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel« (1 Kings

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Piotr ROSZAK, Contemporary trends in the Theological Understanding of Christian Pilgrimage, *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 3 (2022) 116-127.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Toni BRINJOVC, *Preko gibanja do Boga* [Through the motion to the God] (25.03.2015), <https://radio.ognjisce.si/sl/164/utrip/16711/preko-gibanja-do-boga.htm> 2015 (20.12.2022).

18:45). »But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint« (Isa 40:31).

Every person is called to run in obedience to the truth (cf. Gal 5:7) and not to wickedness (cf. Prov 1:16; Jer 23:10; Eze 11:21). This is why Jesus teaches His disciples to be careful where they run and whom they run after (cf. Lk 17:22-23).

Long-distance run is a spiritual experience for many. Miran Žvanut wrote in his personal testimony:

»I realised that long-distance running can be a contemporary ascetic practice that helps me grow in my spiritual life. Through running and prayer, my intimate relationship with God has developed to the point where I feel that my body open to the spiritual, and I understand my body to be a true temple of the Holy Spirit. In practicing prayer while running, my body reacts in a special way in harmony of mind and spirit. The body is the mediator between the inner person and God, the place where I experience God's presence.«<sup>30</sup>

At his first marathon in Belfast, Žvanut experienced a turning point in his understanding of the relationship between bodily movement and the spiritual life:

»I realised that running was much more than physical activity and training of the body. The positive effects on the spiritual level are many. The purification, which we experience in physical effort, is not only bodily, it is also spiritual. Running is a cleansing of the body, mind, and spirit. The body and the spirit become one in a new way and are embraced in searching for God. Both the body and the spirit long for God's presence and when they find it, they merge into one and become one prayer that connects us with God in an inseparable tie.«<sup>31</sup>

What Žvanut describes applies above all to long-distance running. But it can be said that to a lesser extent every run is an indication of a person's spiritual life. A person's physical state reflects his or her spiritual state. The effort to strengthen the body, the sacrifice and self-discipline also affect his or her spiritual life. This is confirmed by Borut Škof:

»In running, which requires a certain amount of effort, patience, perseverance and will, we develop and acquire physical and mental strength, we learn to direct our forces in the right direction and to use them wisely. Through the bodily test of running, we build our self-confidence. The experience of physical exer-

<sup>30</sup> Miran ŽVANUT, A Marathon to freedom, beauty, and joy, in: Pierre BELANGER (ed.), *Jesuits Accompanying Young People*, Roma, General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 2022, 123. But it is also important for people to pause and rest. Like movement, rest has a positive effect on contemplative prayer [cf. Urška JEGLIČ, The impact of sleep on the effectiveness of meditation and contemplative prayer, *Studia Gdańskie*, 50 (2022), 137-148, 145-146].

<sup>31</sup> Žvanut, *A Marathon to freedom...*, 125.

tion is not only sporting. They are also spiritually and personally enriching and ennobling, while at the same time protecting us from stress.«<sup>32</sup>

The effort required by a long-distance run can be a way of physically demonstrating that one is committed to the core values of life and wants to find answers to life's fundamental questions: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Where do I come from? What am I going to do? Where is my salvation? How should I live and act? What is the meaning of my life? What is the goal of my life? What is after death? The search for answers to these existential questions is at the heart of all spirituality.

### 3.3 Dancing

In the Old Testament, the Israelites often danced to express their joy and gratitude to God for their salvation (cf. Exod 15:20; Jer 31:4; Ps 30:12; Job 21:11; Ps 5:15). All danced, men and women, old and young (cf. Jer 31:13). Dancing before the Lord expressed joy and worship (cf. 2 Sam 6:14, 16, 21). »Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp« (Ps 149:3). »Praise him with timbrel and dancing« (Ps 150:4). Dancing was common at religious celebrations (cf. Judg 21:21). It also expressed welcome and joy at the return (cf. Judg 11:34; 1 Sam 18:6-7; Jdt 3:7; 15:12, 13; Lk 15:25).

However, the Bible also warns of the danger of excessive and indulgent dancing. The prophet Amos speaks of the wicked who forsook God and indulged in luxuries, including dancing (cf. Am 2:7; 6:4-7). The prophet Isaiah tells us that those who do not keep God's commandments will be deprived of the joy of drumming and dancing (cf. Is 24:7-12).

The early Greek Church Fathers saw in the Greek dance perichōrēsis, which is a harmonious web of relationships in which there is mutual give and take, the relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The Perichōrēsis is thus a dance of love within the Holy Trinity and to everyone who accepts and engages in the invitation.<sup>34</sup>

Through the sacrament of Baptism, every Christian is admitted into the dance of love of the Triune God, the dance of all dances, which will have no end because its essence is love, which never passes away. It is the beginning. And every day he or she is invited anew to dance along as consciously as possible. Jesus Christ, who is the perfect dance partner of every Christian, invites him

<sup>32</sup> Branko ŠKOF, Tek v naravi [Running in the Nature], 2022, <https://www.tek.si/clanki/tek-v-naravi/> (20.12.2022).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Riyako Cecilia HIKOTA, The Christological Perichoresis and Dance, *Open Theology*, 8 (2022) 191-204, 191-192, <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0202>.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Erika PRIJATELJ, En Bog, Sveta Trojica in etična praksa [One God, Holy Trinity and Ethical Praxis], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 78 (2019) 2, 443-450, 449.

or her to be led by His Spirit, because He knows the dance steps of life in all their fullness.

Hikota, in her article *The Christological Perichōrēsis and Dance*, suggests that we should see Jesus as a dancer. In this she refers to Hippolytus of Rome (170-230) who, in his commentary on Song of Songs 2:8, sees in »the leaping lover« the cosmic dance of Christ. He also cites Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), who speaks of Christ as »the cosmic choirmaster (choral dance master)«<sup>35</sup>, and Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282), who describes »a mystical dance with Christ«<sup>36</sup> where He is the leader and she the companion. Prayer in the form of a dance can lead to a »perichoretic participation«<sup>37</sup> in the love of the Triune God. But if we want to dance with Him, we must - theologically speaking - dance in Christ and with Him in the Spirit.

Dance can also be understood as a process in which a person discovers the rhythm of movement in nature, responds to it with his or her own rhythmic movement and finally becomes one with his or her natural environment. Those who understand their life as a life in the Triune God, in whom they live, move and are (cf. Acts 17:28), can be led into prayer through the movement of dance, in which they enter into dialogue with the One who is the source of life and love.

»If we believe that prayer is the central core of life, then dance, which becomes prayer, also expresses our relationship to God, to others, and to all the world of matter and the spirit. This prayer must originate from our deepest selves. The movements of dance-prayer start from our deep centre, flow outward like rivulets into the stream of life, and impart life everywhere. So dance can be part of prayer, just as stillness can be part of movement and silence can be part of music.«<sup>38</sup>

The dance, then, is able to bring Christians closer to the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and make them more faithful to Him. This is the core of their faith, understood in terms of a positive affirmation of the material world, including the human body. It is therefore important to consider what Hikota highlights in the Christian view of dance:

»Only with a firm focus on the body and bodily experience in light of the mystery of the Incarnation can we finally start to explore the Trinitarian *Perichōrēsis* concretely and meaningfully in light of dance. After all, if the notion of Trinitarian dance were to be taken beyond metaphor to indicate the actual practice of dance as a concrete possibility for spiritual union with the

<sup>35</sup> Hikota, *The Christological Perichoresis...*, 193.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>38</sup> Ona B. BESSETTE, Dance as Prayer: Moving the Body to Stir the Soul, *Journal of Catholic Education*, 3 (1999) 2, 226-236, 230, doi:10.15365/joce.0302092013.

Triune God, such dance must be foremost led by Christ. It is through our body that we may experience such a spiritual dance.«<sup>39</sup>

The dance can also be a great help to spouses who are becoming more and more one in their diversity and who want to realise the *perichōrēsis* in their married life. The testimony of Urša and Blaž also shows how realistic this is:

»We experience dance as the fulfilment of our longing for each other. The dance figures are one of the ways we can hold on to each other. But in a special way, the freedom of dance is an image of our spiritual connection. Although in life itself we are aware of the power (and powerlessness) of words, it is in attentively following each other's feelings. Especially when we follow the impulses we can perceive in the other. When we are able to listen to each other, our life can be, like a dance, a harmony, a rapprochement, a union of our bodies and spirits.«<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. Attention to bodily movement enables a living spirituality

Jesus often encouraged His disciples to look in order to see, and to listen in order to hear and understand (cf. Mt 6; 13; 15; Mk 4; 7; 9; Lk 10). Those who want bodily movement to help them realise some of what we have seen in the description of walking, running and dancing must practise looking and listening or attentiveness. If one approaches the various forms of bodily movement with this attitude, it can lead to a deeper awareness of the spiritual dimension of one's life, uniting body, soul and spirit and connecting him or her with others and all of nature. For the Christian, this means that he or she can turn physical movement into prayer. It is a prayer of listening and looking or contemplation.<sup>41</sup> It is about giving God the space and time to be with Him, and allowing Him to make His redemptive and salvific presence and action real in him or her.

So, before we decide to be consciously with the Triune God through our bodily movement, it is important to first find the time to do it, ideally for at least half an hour, to choose the form of the movement, to find the appropriate space and to prepare for it.

First of all, let us surrender to the sounds of the environment and welcome them. We close our eyes or focus our gaze on something that gathers us. Surrender to the rhythm of breathing. Focus on the sensations in the body, from

<sup>39</sup> Hikota, *The Christological Perichoresis...*, 203.

<sup>40</sup> Ivan PLATOVNJAK, *Interview with Urša in Blaž* (22.12.2022), Ivan Platovnjak's Personal Archive.

<sup>41</sup> For a deeper understanding of contemplation as resonance with the other (the Other) that enables one to experience a new integrity, to find the meaning of life and an integral spirituality, see Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Tone SVETELJ, Ancient Greek and Christian understanding of contemplation in terms of a resonant attitude towards the world, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 82 (2022) 3, 623-637, 630-633, doi: 10.34291/BV2022/03/Platovnjak.

the top of the head to the feet. In this way we are more and more at peace with who we are and with the Triune God in whom we live and dwell (cf. Acts 17:28).

When our whole being is at peace we awaken in ourselves the desire to also enter into the consciousness of the presence of the Triune God. We can do this by making the sign of the cross slowly and as deliberately as possible. We surrender to the presence of the Holy Spirit, who connects and opens us, and ask Him to direct our attention, remind us and teach us.<sup>42</sup> We also ask Him for what we desire to be given to us through Him. Then we turn our attention or mindfulness to the form of bodily movement we have chosen.

It is important to be fully present in the chosen form of movement in inner and outer silence, with nothing else in mind but to be there with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. We must not cultivate expectations of what we want to achieve. There should only be the desire within us to be with God and the willingness to forget ourselves such that we give ourselves completely to the chosen form of movement and become one with it. Let us be completely free in terms of what will happen. Let us accept everything as a free gift from God. Let us be surprised by Him. If we get distracted by any thoughts, let us focus again on the chosen form of movement and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us and remind us of what the Father wants to say to us through Jesus Christ.

A few minutes before the end of the chosen form of movement, reflect on what has happened during the movement. In our own words, we tell the Father through Jesus Christ what has happened and what we feel especially within us now, as with our most intimate friend. Finally, we can say the Our Father or Glory to the Father and, once again, slowly and gratefully make the sign of the cross. We let what has happened resonate within us.

After the attention or the »prayer with the bodily movement, we should take about ten minutes to reflect. This reflection is mainly about becoming aware of what has happened within us during our attention to the chosen form of movement. We try to see and articulate what happened internally, what spiritual impulses we perceived: Desire, resistance, joy, gratitude, contrition, consolation, desolation, fear, doubt, etc. In this way we learn to perceive all the feelings and thoughts within us and to discern the presence and work of the Triune God in our lives and His way of teaching and guiding us. At the end we also make a short note in our spiritual diary about what has happened.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ivan PLATOVNJAK, Food and Spirituality: Contemplation of God's Love while Eating, *Studia Ganskie*, 48 (2021) 81-92, 90, doi: <https://doi.org/10.26142/stgd-2021-005>.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have affirmed that a person's bodily movement, especially his or her walking, running (»long-distance running«) and dancing, is closely linked to his or her spirituality, which we understand as a way of life that enables him or her to seek and find the content, purpose and meaning of life, as well as the answers to life's deepest questions.

For the Christian, the *topos*, the place of concrete encounter between him or herself and the Triune God, is the body.<sup>43</sup> For his or her body »remembers« his Creator, the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, as John Paul II points out, calling him or her to become aware of His active presence and to live in the triune love imprinted in him or her and in all his or her functions, including the functions of movement.<sup>44</sup>

We have seen how the Triune God desires to express Himself in and through human bodily movement, imbuing it with His rhythm, peace, harmony, openness, relaxation and transparency. The more the Christian allows him or herself to be guided by the sense of God the Creator and Father through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, »the more this corporeality becomes the 'material' in which the personal centre expresses itself with its Absolute«<sup>45</sup>, which is the triune God. Human bodily movement is thus called to harmonise with and become ever more transparent to the living and active presence of the Triune God.

The paper confirms that human beings move not only physically but also spiritually, and that physical movement enables them to live a more integral spiritual life. Of course, practising conscious attention to movement is a great help in this.

We briefly presented the spiritual significance and influence of three forms of bodily movement on spiritual life: Walking, running (long distance running) and dancing. There are many other forms, such as swimming, climbing, various forms of physical recreation, etc. These too are waiting to be explored and to show their effects on the spiritual life. In any case, they can be approached in the spirit of the Bible and Christian theology, just as we have approached walking, running and dancing.

We are sure that many Christians who seek spirituality in all these forms of bodily movement, but unfortunately do not find it in Christianity, will look for it elsewhere. We believe that this is an area where the Triune God is still waiting for many Christians to discover Him and allow Him to be with them

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Christopher WEST, *Teologija telesa za začetnike* [Theology of the Body for Beginners], Ljubljana, Družina, 2014, 3-8.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the body*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 9. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Vladimiv TRUHLAR, *Temeljni elementi duhovne teologije* [The Fundamental Elements of Spiritual Theology], Celje, Mohorjeva družba, 2004, 59.

in this too, and that every bodily movement becomes a place and time for their personal and deeply transforming encounter with Him and an integrally lived spirituality that also enables them to be resilient<sup>46</sup>.

Ivan Platovnjak\* – Vinko Zovko\*\*

*Ljudsko tjelesno kretanje i duhovnost*

Sažetak

Kretanje je stvarnost koja je povezana sa svim dimenzijama našega života i djelovanja. Ljudi se kreću na različite načine i u različite svrhe. Razna istraživanja potvrđuju da redovita tjelesna aktivnost pozitivno utječe na čovjekovo cjelokupno zdravlje. U ovom članku autori ispituju vezu između tjelesnoga kretanja osobe i njezine duhovnosti. U četiri poglavlja učvršćuju tezu da se ljudska bića ne kreću samo fizički nego i duhovno te da im njihovo tjelesno kretanje omogućuje cjelovitiji duhovni život. U prvom poglavlju ukratko opisuju kretanje kao temeljnu stvarnost ljudskoga života. U drugom poglavlju definiraju duhovnost koja uvijek treba biti živa i također utjelovljena u kretanju. U trećem poglavlju opisuju kršćansku duhovnost življenu u različitim oblicima ljudskog tjelesnog kretanja. Ograničavaju se na tri osnovna: hodanje, trčanje i ples. Budući da često nedostaje veza između teorije i prakse, u posljednjem poglavlju autori ukratko opisuju kako veća pozornost usmjerena na tjelesno kretanje može više utjecati na duhovni život.

*Ključne riječi: duhovnost, hodanje, molitva, usredotočena svjesnost, ples, tjelesno kretanje, trčanje.*

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Bojan ŽALEC, Reziliencija, teologalne kreposti in odzivna Cerkev [Resilience, Theological Virtues, and a Responsive Church], *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 80 (2020) 2, 267-279, 269-276, doi: 10.34291/BV2020/02/Zalec.

\* Doc. dr. sc. Ivan Platovnjak, Sveučilište u Ljubljani, Teološki fakultet; Poljanska cesta 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija; e-mail: ivan.platovnjak@teof.uni-lj.si.

\*\* Vinko Zovko, mag., viši predavač, Sveučilište u Ljubljani, Ekonomski fakultet; Kardeljeva plaščad 17, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija; e-mail: Vinko.zovko@ef.uni-lj.si.