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The Body and Religion

1. Introduction

When we look at the human body from the perspective of individual world religions, we see a huge variety of ways of interpreting it, shaping it, and engaging it in everyday practices or ceremonial rituals. We will also see that religions, in addition to providing their followers with worldviews and axionormative planes, have established the body as the central and, at the same time, executive object of their ideas and dogmas. According to the classics of sociology Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, religion is more than a set of theological beliefs and convictions. It is also a source of ways of behaving and values that shape and discipline the body in various ways. Although religion and religiosity have been constantly present in the most important discussions conducted within the humanities and social sciences for over a hundred years, the issue of the relationship between the body and religion seems to be an unsystematized area in the sociology of the body.

The paradigm that most often appears in sociological publications referring to the relations between religion and the body is that of bodily regimes imposed by religions (M. Foucault, J. Butler, P.A. Mellor, and C. Shilling). Their goal is to develop and socially strengthen the mechanisms of self-control and restraint, which include methods of controlling sexuality, reproduction, diet, and violence or shaping dispositions for the sake of general social stability. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the common area connecting religions with the body goes far beyond bodily regimes. Drawing inspiration from the achievements of cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, sociology of medicine, social psychology, and cognitive sciences, we can see a number of other levels connecting religions with the body: starting from the ways of experiencing religious ecstasies that bring the human body closer to the sphere of the sacred, through the symbolic dimensions hidden in relics or the ways of unifying and strengthening the sense of community through appearance, ending with changes in the perception of the body related to the phenomenon of secularization or privatization of religion.

2. The most important theoretical concepts

At this point, it should be emphasized that in the Western achievements of sociology of the body, the issues discussed in the introduction have not been systematically theorized. Although numerous attempts have been made to analyze the relationship between religion and the body from a theological, historical, comparative, philosophical, and, finally, dogmatic perspectives, none of the leading sociologists of the body have attempted to collect and organize them. Individual chapters devoted to this topic contained in Western textbooks on sociology of the body usually refer to one selected perspective (e.g., Turner 2008) or approach the subject from a problem-based perspective, analyzing specific rites, rituals or customs.

In order to thoroughly discuss the issue of the body and religion, I will try to refer to both, the achievements of classic sociologists and selected representatives of anthropology, who have been dealing with the symbolic and functional influence of religion on the human body for decades. In addition, I will try to systematize the most important studies and publications describing the relationship between the body and religion from a problem-based and thematic perspective.

Religious narratives about the body

By reviewing historical studies of narratives and ideas dominant in individual religions, we can easily distinguish dichotomous interpretations of the body. In many cases, universalist concepts of good and evil have influenced the way the human body is perceived and used. Below are examples of the most popular narratives.

The foundations of the dualistic way of perceiving the body can be found in various archaic myths explaining the emergence of the idea of evil and sin, which are among the common elements of Abrahamic religions.¹ As the French philosopher Paul Ricœur has noted, in the Christian world, the milestone is the Adamic myth, describing the fall and expulsion of man from Paradise, the myth that “puts an end to the times of innocence, while on the other hand it gives rise to the times of curse,” (Ricœur 1986: 230), with which successive generations of practitioners have struggled for centuries.

Already in the Middle Ages, European Christian Churches spread the beliefs emphasizing the impurity and sinfulness of the human body, which without proper means of control and techniques of self-restraint could inevitably lead the faithful to their destruction. Two related perspectives were common at that time, the common foundation of which was the weak and sinful human nature resulting, among others, from the difficulty of controlling sexual drive. The first of them, and, at the same time, the most widespread, treated the body (usually the female one) as a temptation, the second as an instrument of sin. Such narratives dominated social institutions,

1 Religions that in their beginnings referred to the life and teachings of the patriarch Abraham, who initiated the idea of belief in one god. The three main Abrahamic religions are Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

services, and sacred art. As Jacques Gélis, a historian and anthropologist, explained, these narratives were accompanied by threats of damnation intended to arouse fear and subordination in practitioners (Gélis 2011: 17). The techniques propagated at that time as remedies included various forms of mortification and abuse of the body, ranging from rigorous fasting practices and ending with various methods of self-mutilation. As Caroline Walker Bynum explained, such actions were merely a manifestation of the desire to experience suffering comparable to that of Christ, which, according to the self-mortifiers, would ultimately lead to certain redemption (Walker Bynum 1987). As Chris Shilling noted, various rigorous and, at the same time, extremely drastic penitential practices, instead of helping to distance oneself from the body, attached the sinner even more to it (Shilling 2012).

The opposite narrative, which saw the body as pure, carefree and harmonious, appeared in Renaissance representations describing the life of Adam and Eve in paradise. Healthy bodies, free from temptation and lust, were a symbol of a happy eternal life. Another positive image of the human body also appeared in the works of French theologians. An example could be the works of Francis de Sales, the 16th-century saint of the Catholic Church, who not only drew attention to the affinity of the human body for the body of its Creator and the body of the Savior, but also emphasized its important role on the path to salvation. He claimed that the body and soul were an integral whole that must be appreciated and cared for, because it was this whole that was to experience eternal happiness (Salezy 2002). Referring to the philosophical and, at the same time, semi-medical achievements of European saints, it is also necessary to mention the figure of Hildegard of Bingen. Drawing on the work of Greek philosophers, she created a system of specific recommendations to ensure the well-being of the human body, which was a manifestation of God's most perfect plan. The philosophy she created sought to maintain harmony between man and the universe in which he lived. The set of recommendations she developed was based on a proper diet, a balance maintained between movement and rest, and virtuous Christian deeds that were to ensure physical and spiritual well-being.

In Islam, another Abrahamic religion, the way of perceiving the human body has not changed so radically over the centuries. The relatively constant reception of the human body was a derivative of two factors. The first of them is based on religious law, the so-called *Shari'ah*, the direct source of which is God and which is constantly observed and enforced by believers (Scarabel 2000: 81). The second is a derivative of the concept that the human body is a work of God, which should be cared for in accordance with specific principles described in the Quran (e.g., one should observe the principles related to proper nutrition or sexual life). The human body is not inherently sinful, but when used improperly, it can become a source of sin. The principles of proper conduct are dependent on gender, because women and men, according to their individual physiological characteristics, perform different functions in society. The way of perceiving and treating the human body was defined by Muhammad himself, who initiated the cult of the body and specified which bodily needs should be controlled and which can be properly satisfied (Pachniak,

Nowaczek-Walczak 2016). A sinful person who breaks the rules of proper conduct can be punished according to the principles of religious law (Scarabel 2000).

Also in the work of the classic of sociology, Émile Durkheim, we can find important analogies that fit into the dichotomy of the sinful and holy body. Although the human body belongs to the secular sphere – the profane, through proper conduct it has a chance to transform. It has a hidden aspect of the sacred within it, which can be expressed and developed through ritual practices and adherence to the rules of proper behavior (Durkheim 1976). Thanks to consistency and proper “pure” actions, such a body has a chance to become holy.

In the case of Far Eastern religions, the concept of a pure and sinful body is very rarely encountered. This is because the perspective of existence and its durability is not limited by the physical form of the earthly body. The concept of karma and the ideas of reincarnation significantly change the perception of reality by believers. In Eastern religions, the perception of time is circular, not linear. In Hinduism and Buddhism, life is closed in a circle, the so-called *samsara*.² In Indian religions, the relationship between *samsara* and man is based on the idea of the soul, which, as a result of the accumulation of negative previous actions, according to the law of karma, is trapped in a cycle of subsequent rebirths, from which it tries to liberate itself. In the case of Buddhist concepts, the entity that is constantly reborn is not the soul, but the mind (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2006: 964). Yes, in Eastern religions there is a need to purify negative impressions accumulated as a result of improper actions, but the ultimate cause of improper activities is not the body. The human body is not seen as evil and sinful in itself. As John Powers has explained, the narratives we can encounter in classical Indian literature only warn against potential wrong actions that a person can commit, they do not treat the human body as inherently evil. The teachings conveyed in classical Buddhist texts only warn against excessive attachment to the body and corporeality, which, as a result, instead of helping to liberate one from the cycle of *samsara*, can cause a person to become even more attached to it (Powers 2012: 112). Devotion to practice and the performance of various purification rituals are intended to cleanse negative impressions accumulated in previous lives, as well as to accumulate the so-called merit from all positive and noble activities. For this very reason, in both Buddhism and Hinduism we can encounter many practices whose task is not to cleanse the “sinful body,” but rather to purify the mind and, consequently, karma. As John Powers has noted, although having a human body involves the risk of developing attachment to it, being reborn in a human body is seen by Buddhists as an opportunity for liberation from the cycle of *samsara* (Powers 2012: 112). This is because, according to the teachings describing the worlds in which beings can be reborn, in the lower realms (hell, hungry ghost, and animal worlds) beings constantly experience an overwhelming amount of suffering that does not allow them to consciously act to liberate themselves from the cycle of constant rebirths (Powers 2012: 112).

2 Which from Sanskrit can be translated as running around.

The body in religious regimes: theoretical foundations

Discussions about the ways in which religion shapes the body should begin from the topic of individualization and civilization of the human body through its gradual distancing from the state of nature. As shown in the previous section, in the Middle Ages it was religion that created the social mechanism that enabled human drives to be subdued and the principles of social life to be regulated, e.g., by identifying sinful and good actions. Gradually, religion began to perform a defining and disciplinary function. As Bryan Turner explained, the authority of the church in Western Europe was already growing stronger at that time, claiming the right to control other beliefs (e.g., pagan ones), identifying and promoting knowledge about miracles or the lives of saints, and supervising not only people's actions but also their thoughts (Turner 2016: 106–107). As Philip Mellor and Chris Shilling (1997: 42) noted, the strengthening of the processes of creation and at the same time control of the human body appeared with the development of Protestant thought. As they explained, this happened as a result of the accumulation of three different, interconnected changes. The first of these was the clear separation of the human body from the state of nature and beliefs in supernatural forces through the development of new cognitive mechanisms referring to the empirical experience of the surrounding world. The second group of transformations was based on the idea of the complete subordination of the human body to the principles and values propagated in Protestantism. The third was the inability to control human emotions and passions despite the application of defined rules, consequently increasing the fear for one's own and other people's bodies, which could lead to sinful actions. As a result, official directives were created regarding discipline and the principles of proper, rational behavior so widely described by Max Weber (2013). As Shilling noted, the central concepts activated within the framework of the changes in customs caused by industrialization and the development of capitalism were values and norms consistent with Protestant thought, such as the idea of self-renunciation and vocation or the ethos of hard work, which Weber exhaustively analyzed (Shilling 2012: 103). He drew attention to the mechanisms of control over human sexuality and desire, which could negatively affect the effectiveness of work, so important for the new capitalist world. As he claimed, it is precisely "work that is a proven form of asceticism, long appreciated in the Western Church [...], namely, it is a specific prophylaxis against all those temptations that Puritanism called «unclean life,»" (Weber 1984: 91). Active action and involvement in work were, in Weber's opinion, the only proper and significant activities that, according to the ideas of Protestantism, people should perform in order to increase the glory of God.

At this point, for contrast, it is worth citing the more contemporary thought of Turner, who drew attention to an interesting transformation of customs characteristic of late capitalism. As he noted, the Protestant ascetic values exhaustively described by Weber ceased to suppress and limit the needs of the human body in favor of productivity. Asceticism and limiting desires ceased to be the driving force of production. Paradoxically, the once suppressed and limited desire, the pursuit

of satisfying hedonistic needs, became the foundation of commercial sensualism (Turner 2008: 211). The ever-increasing need to provide various sensory experiences and physical satisfaction began to drive production and services, strengthening the capitalist economy. Tomasz Szlendak also drew attention to the problem of changes in the sphere of sexual behaviors among young Poles, trying to capture the relationships between religious views and consumer culture (Szlendak 2008).

In analyzing the religious mechanisms for limiting human drive, Weber distinguished between two types of ascetic practices: secular and monastic. Ascetic activities characteristic of secular people were aimed at careful and methodical work, as he claimed, idleness or contemplation were reprehensible. Secular puritanical sexual practices were permitted only when their goal was procreation. As he claimed, “sexual intercourse is permitted even in marriage only as a means by which God wills to increase his glory,” (Weber 1984: 91). In the case of monastic life, contemplation took on a new meaning, one could say that it was interpreted as a spiritual form of work permitted and even required of ordained persons. Devotion to prayer and religious singing was characterized by Weber as a proper action that also increased God’s glory (Weber 1984: 91). Although Weber’s starting point for his considerations of asceticism was Christianity, in his works he also devoted much attention to asceticism practiced in other religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. As in the case of the analyses of Protestantism, he tried to characterize proper and sinful actions and their potential results. Nonetheless, they will not be cited here due to the cursory and inappropriate nature of his analyses resulting from the lack of access to reliable knowledge about these religions.³ This does not mean, however, that the issue of bodily regimes and ascetic practices cultivated in other world religions will be abandoned. Quite the opposite.

Manifestations of religious practices disciplining the body

The philosophy of physical restraint and ascetic practices is also present in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, as is the idea of suffering. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing here that in each of these religions the path of asceticism and the idea of suffering are perceived in different ways. In Buddhism, similar to the previously cited examples of Christian practices, we can observe various forms of limiting and controlling physical needs. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that their use in the religious practice has a completely different reason. One such example is the practice of *sojong* used in Buddhism, during which the practitioner is obliged, among others, not to eat meat, to consume food during the day from early morning until noon only, and is also obliged to refrain from all sexual activity. The aim is not to try to increase the sense of suffering in the practicing Buddhist,

3 The reasons for this state of affairs were incorrect and erroneous translations often referring to Christian concepts. One of the simplest examples was the way in which Buddhist monks spoke about their practice. Max Weber wrote about the idea of “salvation” and the concern for “the salvation of other people’s souls” (Weber 2006: 412–413).

but the need to maintain the body in a good condition along with a clear and conscious mind. According to classical explanations, this type of bodily abstinence has a positive effect on the meditation process, limiting potential obstacles that distract from concentration and practice.⁴ Of course, the example given above is just one of many forms of practice performed by Buddhists.

Another issue that should be mentioned here is the practice of *yoga*, of which we can encounter various schools and traditions throughout India. The etymology of the word *yoga* itself classifies the exercises performed within it as bodily regimes. The term comes from Sanskrit and is translated as “connection,” “binding,” “to subjugate” or “to put a yoke on” (Świerzowska 2009: 9). In the classical sense, the term *yoga* refers to all kinds of ascetic and meditative activities, which, as a result of their systematic use, are intended to free the practitioner from specific states of consciousness (which include, among others, illusions, an incorrect perception of reality or the entirety of psychological experiences experienced by individuals who do not practice yoga) and enable the experience of differently understood (depending on the tradition) states of transcendence and spiritual perfection. The path that is supposed to lead to liberation is a set of various activities, which include, among others, a series of prohibitions aimed at purifying the body and soul (i.e., sexual restraint, prohibitions against killing, lying or stealing); commandments referring to the desire to deepen knowledge, maintain a state of contentment and maintain proper motivation; a proper breathing technique; and the practice of *asanas* – specific physical exercises aimed at effortlessly maintaining the body in a specific state, which is supposed to facilitate concentration and be a stable and pleasant experience (Eliade 1988: 35–37). The set of yogic actions shaping the physical condition (starting with muscle flexibility, control of internal organs or ways of breathing) is intended to help the practitioner experience a total state, free from the limitations of the human existence. As Mircea Eliade has explained, properly performed exercises cause the experience of a state of “suspension,” which is identified as the final stage of psychophysical asceticism. “Motionless, making his respiration rhythmical, fixing his gaze and his attention on a single point, the yogin is «concentrated,» «unified,»” (Eliade 1988: 37). However, such a state of suspension is not the end of the path, it only creates the right foundation for experiencing the right meditative concentration, referred to as *samadhi*. The experience of the state of *samadhi*, meditative insight, is the final crowning achievement of all ascetic efforts, which according to classical explanations can awaken various secret powers in the practitioner, including the ability to levitate, become invisible or awaken the awareness of everyday lives, which, nevertheless, should not be used until the state of freedom is achieved. At this point, we can draw an interesting conclusion, which shows that according to Indian religious and philosophical traditions, all kinds of renunciations do not deepen the practitioner’s sense of suffering; on the contrary,

4 Abstinence from all sexual activity helps to reduce the need for physical desire, while restrictions on meals minimize drowsiness during meditation.

they are perceived in a positive way. As with Buddhist practices, in Hinduism the purpose of renunciation is not to weaken the practitioner but to strengthen him.

In Judaism, we can also find many examples of practices that we can assign to the so-called bodily regimes. The main source of commands and prohibitions observed by the followers of traditional Judaism is the Talmud, which is a collection of explanations and commentaries on the Torah. The guidelines collected in it discipline the everyday life of followers in numerous aspects. They take into account both everyday and festive behaviors. They explain and structure the ways of praying, celebrating, eating, resting, and traveling. For example, the rules of celebrating Yom Kippur are based on fasting and asceticism. Every year on a selected day at the turn of October, every practicing Jew is obliged to strictly fast, not do any work and abstain from sexual intercourse. His thoughts should be focused on prayer and the expectation of receiving forgiveness from God. As Ninel Kameraz-Kos has explained, it is a holiday of reconciliation, because it refers to the day when “Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Tablets of the Law and announced to the Hebrews that God had forgiven them the sin of worshipping the «golden calf,»” (Kameraz-Kos 2008: 47). Another example of a bodily regime commonly observed in Judaism is *kashrut*, the dietary rules, commonly known as kosher rules. These rules are based on the prohibition of eating blood, the permission to eat only certain types of meat, and the separation of meat and dairy dishes. They are very detailed and extensively described. They take into account not only the origin of individual foods, but also how they are prepared and stored (Kameraz-Kos 2008).

In Islam, the most well-known and most widespread practices of physical rigor are fasting and asceticism (the so-called *saum*), which are commonly observed during the celebration of Ramadan. During this month, every Muslim is obliged to observe broadly understood abstinence, both physical and mental. On the physical level, the faithful are obliged from dawn to sunset not to accept any foreign objects or substances, including food or drinks, as well as cigarette smoke (Scarabel 2000). During this time, the faithful should also refrain from all sexual activities. This is also a time when every Muslim should avoid quarrels or conflicts. Shouting, vulgarity or aggressive behavior are prohibited. Such intense engagement of the body and mind of practitioners is intended to honor, commemorate and, at the same time, emphasize the importance of the events that took place during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar.⁵ In addition, it is a set of physical practices that is intended to purify and improve the bodies of believers. It is also a time when practitioners have the opportunity to strengthen their spiritual practice, reminding themselves of the norms and values upheld in Islam.

5 The most important event was the revelation of the Quran.

Asceticism and the concept of suffering

Shifting attention from the concept of ascetic actions to the subject of suffering, we can see that the differences between Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu perceptions are also significant. As Mellor has explained, in comparing the ideas of suffering in Christianity, we can see that it is one of the factors that strengthen the meaning of religious life, thanks to which, by encouraging reflection, it brings the faithful closer to God. According to Mellor, in Buddhism, suffering is also strongly connected with the lives of practitioners, but it is not perceived as a factor enabling the approach to the sacred; its perception is completely different. Awareness of the existence of suffering is one of the reasons why Buddhists seek to free themselves from it through meditation practices and the teachings left by Buddha. In principle, at the ultimate level, suffering is only an illusion, an unreal phenomenon, nonetheless, developing such an understanding is possible only after achieving enlightenment. We can find a similar approach in Indian religions, for example, according to the assumptions of the *Samkhya* philosophy (the foundation of yoga), suffering exists solely as an objective state experienced by the human body, which receives and interprets reality through the ten senses.⁶ In a simplified way, it can be explained that the basis of suffering is the illusory perception of the unity of the soul, body and mind. As Mircea Eliade explained,

Pain exists only to the extent that experience is referred to the human personality regarded as identical with the Self. But since this relation is illusory, it can easily be abolished. When spirit is known and assumed, values are annulled; pain is then no longer either pain or nonpain but a mere fact. From the moment we understand that the Self is free, eternal, and inactive, everything that happens to us – pain, feelings, volition, thoughts, etc. – no longer belongs to us. Knowledge is a simple “awakening” that unveils the essence of the Self (Eliade 2008: 34).

The conclusions of contemporary research analyzing the topic of asceticism or body regimes provide new perspectives that change the way they have been perceived to date. This is because the cultural, socio-technological context is constantly changing, creating new challenges for contemporary religions. The conclusions of research conducted by Srinivas Tulasi among the members of the international movement of *Shirdi Sai Baba* followers (whose origins lie in the tradition of Vedic Hinduism) have shown that ascetic activities, adapted to contemporary realities, instead of limiting, provide practitioners with power and strength. According to Tulasi, the implementing the strategy of frugality promoted within the Sai Baba movement and applying body abstinence results in a significant increase in self-awareness and inner power (Tulasi 2012).

⁶ According to traditional explanations, the 10 senses include: „The 5 senses of reason (hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell) and 5 senses of action (speech, grasping, walking, excretion, and procreation) (Sankhja).

The body in rites and rituals: theoretical foundations

In order to discuss the issue of rituals, it is a good idea to focus on how sociologists and anthropologists define this phenomenon. Unfortunately, as in the case of “culture” or “religion,” it is difficult to find an unambiguous definition. However, one can try to look for universals in the definitions of such authors as Catherine Bell, Randall Collins, Mary Douglas, Erving Goffman or Roy A. Rappaport, who have devoted much attention to the topic of rituals in their scholarly work. They have treated rituals as recurring social events that consist of sequences of actions or statements reenacted by the participants in a given situation. The reader would, therefore, probably think that the identified common elements of the definition could apply to a huge range of social events, and what is more, they might begin to wonder whether a ritual identified in this way could not apply to various recurring actions observed in the animal world, such as mating behavior. There would probably be nothing wrong with this, because many anthropologists and ethnographers began their analyses with such comparisons (see Huxley 1966). Nevertheless, in delving further into the explanations describing the characteristics of rites and rituals proposed by the above-mentioned anthropologists and sociologists, one can quickly notice that the common features of the proposed definitions end with such a laconic description. The elements that significantly differentiate the perspectives they promote are such issues as the motivations and goals or regulations and principles of conducting the described phenomena. Different ways of perceiving and characterizing religious rites affect not only the perception of the rites themselves, they also significantly affect the perception of the body participating in them. Although it is often not the direct addressee of theoretical analyses, it often appears as a side topic. For this reason, by focusing on the body, the reader has the opportunity to awaken their sociological imagination to capture the various factors that shape it. The following paragraphs will present selected theoretical approaches discussing rituals in the context of the rules and principles of their performance, intentions and purpose, or the structure of rites.

An interesting example of analyses concerning the formal aspect of rituals are the thoughts of Mary Douglas, who tried to capture in a comprehensive way the physical, cultural, and religious dimensions of the actions undertaken by participants in religious ceremonies. In her famous treatise published over five decades ago, in just two sentences she managed to capture the multi-threaded and complex nature of the relationship between the individual and social perception of the human body. “The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society,” (Douglas 2015: 69). The quoted sentences were the foundation for further considerations on the essence of religious rituals, in which Douglas sought certain rules and methods of expressing the social system through control over the body or its lack. She has distinguished between two dimensions of social action characteristic of controlling religions, in which ritualism has a significantly defined framework, and ecstatic religions, in which social

solidarity is strengthened by abandoning strong social control (Douglas 2015). In her opinion, in the first case, the symbolic system is strongly structured, the definition of a magical or religious situation is clearly defined; during the ritual, social roles and the symbolic dimension of individual actions are clearly emphasized. In the second case, the patterns of behavior and relations between the ritual participants are not so clearly defined; ritual participants can act spontaneously, and the symbolic dimension of objects and gestures is blurred. Within the framework of the cited typology, Douglas has also discussed the phenomenon of trance, which in both cases is understood and interpreted in a different way. In her opinion, in controlling and strongly structured religions, trance states are perceived as a threat, while in ecstatic religions, trance can be one of the essential elements of the ritual. Citing numerous examples from various ethnographic studies and taking into account the level of social control in rituals, she cited and extended Raymond Firth's typology of trance states. The first category includes cases in which a person in a trance loses complete control over their body to an external force or spirit that has possessed them. The second describes situations in which a person experiencing a trance acts as a medium, passing on information from spirits and the dead or predicting the future. The third type of trance concerns the activities of religious professionals (e.g., shamans), for whom the moment of haunting is the norm. The last, fourth category concerns situations in which, as part of a ritual, a person experiencing a trance loses consciousness, but such a situation is not perceived as a threat. On the contrary, according to Douglas, during such rituals, trance has a positive dimension, because "it is a channel of benign power for all. This is the positive cult of trance as such," (Douglas 2015: 80). Of course, it should be remembered that Douglas' proposed interpretation of the perception of the human body during religious ceremonies is one of many anthropological proposals. In the following part of the subchapter, I will try to cite other perspectives that help us better understand and grasp this issue.

When we talk about the reasons why religious rituals are performed, it is worth referring to the works of Roy A. Rappaport, who has claimed that it is precisely rites and rituals that are the substrate from which religion grows (Rappaport 1999). He also noted that it would be impossible to clearly define the content characteristic of religious rites performed all over the world. Therefore, he made a cursory characterization of five elements appearing in rituals practiced on different continents. The first feature concerns the genesis of rituals. According to Rappaport, their creators are not the individuals performing them. The sequences of actions, sounds or statements come from people who are not their performers.⁷ Their authors are usually their ancestors. The second concerns the issue also taken up by Douglas, which is the formal dimension of rituals – the characteristics of their form and the specific context in which they are performed, the so-called decorum principle – referring to the harmonious combination of the content and form of the ritual.

7 The exceptions are situations in which new rituals gradually emerge.

This refers to their detailed and lofty dimension, repetition or regularity of actions and statements. The third, which is directly related to the second, concerns their relatively unchanging form, while the fourth concerns the very necessity of their reproduction. The fifth again refers to the formal aspect of the performed rituals, but this time it concerns their communicative dimension and physical or symbolic effectiveness (Rappaport 1999: 24–54). An additional element, which has not been defined as a separate characteristic feature of religious rituals, but which constantly appears in Roy A. Rappaport's considerations, is their symbolic dimension. It concerns not only the undertaken actions or statements, but also the appearance of the bodies of the participants, places, and objects. As Rappaport has claimed, the body of the individual performing a given ritual not only participates in a given ritual, but through its active participation accepts and reproduces its order. It creates and sustains the meaning reproduced during the ceremony. Moreover, poses or gestures performed during the rites take the form of expression; they are a form of materialization of the immaterial. They can, therefore, be a form of communication symbolizing, for instance, devotion, submission or joy and satisfaction (Rappaport 1999: 50).

Another important theoretical approach emphasizing the symbolic dimension and significance of the human body is the concept of rites of passage defined by Arnold van Gennep (van Gennep 2019). Although the human body is not the focal point of his analyses, it seems to be an important element in all the rituals he has discussed. It is the subject that experiences transformation, as well as the addressee of all kinds of ritual actions. As a reminder, it is worth mentioning that van Gennep defined rites of passage as all kinds of customs accompanying a person at moments of transformation occurring during growing up, changes in status, place or social position. As he has claimed, each such rite of passage consists of three separate stages. The first is the stage of separation or exclusion, when a person begins their transformation and abandons their previously performed social function, sheds all its associated attributes. The second stage, called the liminal phase, concerns the time in which the person experiencing the transformation becomes physically and symbolically separated, is outside the previously performed social function, temporarily resides on the margin of the social structure to which they belong. The third stage concerns the act of reincorporating the person experiencing the transformation into society. It is the moment when the participant of the transformation acquires new rights and new functions, and roles are assigned to him, and he takes a new position in the social structure. Although in van Gennep's analyses it is not the body but the process of transformation and changes that is the central point of his concept, in the source texts or descriptions of individual rituals it is the human organism that seems to be the most important element. This was confirmed by the analyses of Victor W. Turner, who developed the concept of rites of passage, devoting much attention to the liminal phase (Turner 1977). As he claimed, the intermediate stage was a time when all previous and future elements of the social order attributed to the position and role of a given individual were suspended. This was the moment when an individual growing up or changing their previous social

status transformed physically and mentally. They acquired knowledge, new social competences, and were an object shaped in accordance with the norms of the society to which they belonged. Turner, describing the state of liminal beings, compared them to clay or matter that took on a new form (Turner 1977). Before entering a new state, it was subjected to various purification practices, applied the principle of sexual abstinence or underwent ritual practices (e.g., circumcision). As Turner wrote,

the neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society (Turner 1977: 103).

An important characteristic of the liminal phase is also the belief that the person in transition has the closest contact with superhuman beings, deities or other supernatural powers. This is a phase in which the purity and independence created during rituals takes on an additional, mystical dimension.

Relics and bodies of saints – functional and symbolic dimensions

In stimulating the sociological imagination during reflection on the perception of the body in world religions, it is worth paying attention to the various ways of interpreting their symbolic and functional dimensions. The comparative perspective proposed in the following paragraphs clearly highlights the differences that appear in the reception of the body of saints, and both, spiritual and secular individuals.

When leafing through the pages of the history of the Christian religion, one can see the process of changes in the way the bodies of saints and relics were perceived. Christian saints and their life stories were a source of inspiration, proof that salvation was possible. For this reason, as a source of encouragement and an incentive to fervent practice, the art of iconography developed so greatly. The cult of relics also developed significantly. The faithful were convinced of the miraculous power of images or bodies of deceased saints. Initially, however, the techniques for handling the bodies of the deceased were strongly dependent on legal and cultural regulations. For example, at the beginning of our era, Roman law did not allow any practices of exhuming or dismembering the bodies of deceased people. For this reason, the cult of relics originated in the way the bodies of the first martyrs, who had sacrificed their lives for their faith, were handled. According to the belief, their pre-mortal martyrdom brought them closer to God, while ensuring quick salvation. It was believed that their remains were tangible proof of sacrifice and great devotion that allowed them to unite with God. Since the 2nd century AD, the bodies of martyrs were buried with great reverence, along with information about the exact date and cause of death. In order for the memory of their deeds not to fade, Christians kept a special register taking into account the place and date of burial. Thanks to this, on death anniversaries they gathered at the grave of the deceased to pray and

celebrate the Eucharist on altars specially built by the graves (Klawczyński 2018). The participants in prayers often came from far away to commemorate the actions and deeds of the martyrs. Over the years, increasingly more believers participated in these events, which initiated the tradition of building churches on the graves of saints. At the turn of the 7th century, the practice of dividing and moving the bodies of saints became widespread, which resulted in the construction of many new churches. Since then, the relics of saints have been placed under altars where services were held (Klawczyński 2018). Many miraculous properties were attributed to them. It was believed that they were the cause of numerous recoveries. It was also believed that they protected the parish and the faithful from misfortunes. For this reason, the relics of saints were surrounded by special veneration. The popularization of such beliefs, along with the advancing Christianization of the Western world, created a huge demand for the remains of saints. As a result, a number of methods and techniques were developed that allowed duplication of the miraculous posthumous properties attributed to relics. Fragments of clothes or other objects belonging to the deceased saint began to be used, and valuable materials were also used, which after physical contact with the remains of saints took on valuable properties.⁸ Interestingly, over time, the phenomenon of the cult of saints' relics was clarified and became part of canon law. As a result, the bodies of the blessed and saints could be universally venerated only after beatification. As Piotr Klawczyński explained, the beatification “of a given person is normally associated with permission for a local cult. On the other hand, canonization eliminates this boundary and the cult of a specific saint thus becomes universal,” (Klawczyński 2017: 118).

If we are looking for characteristic features identified among living, contemporary Christians, we may encounter certain difficulties. It is difficult to isolate specific physical features that would clearly identify a believer. Only monks, nuns or priests can be easily selected by their clothing. As Marcin Jewdokimow has noted, contemporary methods of the self-presentation (including online) of religious individuals enable the interpenetration of various types of the elements of secular everyday life, which contributes to the expansion of the phenomenon of semantic secularization⁹ (Jewdokimow 2017).

Looking for an equivalent of the Christian saint in Buddhist concepts, we will find the figure of a *bodhisattva*, a person who strives to achieve enlightenment by performing positive actions with the motivation to benefit others (Krajewska 2016: 38). Looking at historical illustrations of *bodhisattvas* in literature or painting, one can easily see the various physical attributes characteristic of a healthy and beautiful body. As John Powers has noted, the reason for this way of presenting *bodhisattvas* is the cultural canon that connects physical beauty and health with

8 Over time, relics began to be traded, which contributed to the creation of many counterfeit items.

9 Monks, in creating their image, increasingly reject the image of a modest, ascetic and prayer-focused life.

spiritual achievements. As he explained, a beautiful external physical body was evidence of the perfect internal qualities that could not be verified by the senses (Powers 2012). As he explained, in the past many fools or charlatans could give the impression of being wise by repeating the words of other great teachers or masters. Nonetheless, on the physical level they were not capable of manipulation, being limited by their own appearance; they were not able to imitate the perfect qualities of their bodies. In various translations, noble, wise, generous, compassionate and just monarchs also enjoyed the qualities of external beauty, but not all of them. As John Powers noted, a being whose body was presented as exceptionally perfect was Buddha Śākyamuni.¹⁰ His perfect physical appearance clearly distinguished him from other gods, representatives of other religions or lay people (Powers 2012: 227). The symbolic dimension hidden in his physicality was intended to inspire his disciples to practice. Probably here the belief proclaimed by all Buddhists, saying that every person has a chance to awaken and achieve enlightenment, also has a chance to become a Buddha, played an important role.

In Hinduism, the image of a holy person and their body is somewhat more complicated. The first concept, whose symbolic dimension should be referred to here, is the idea of the so-called *avatar*.¹¹ This is a being that is a physical manifestation of a deity that has decided to be reborn on Earth to restore order and harmony. Various artistic and literary forms of presenting such deities can be classified into three groups – human, animal, and hybrid. The variety of their forms and symbolic dimension are enormous, for example, in various translations we can count ten different incarnations of the god Vishnu, who took forms belonging to all three groups. He, therefore, has taken a form called *Kurma*, in which he is a turtle; a form called *Narasimha*, in which he is half human, half lion; or *Krishna*, who has a completely human form (Miller 2014: 123).

Sadhu is a term for one of the most widespread forms of spiritual life practiced in Hinduism. They are ascetics who have abandoned traditional secular life to devote themselves to contemplation in search of liberation. They usually lead a very modest life of celibacy. They are socially identified as noble, good, peaceful, righteous and properly behaving people. Nevertheless, not every *sadhu* follows the same path of practice as there are many different traditions cultivating various ways of living. Some spend their lives wandering, others live in small communities, devoting themselves to group practices, while others still live in solitude, inhabiting caves or small huts (Miller 2014). Despite the many differences in the ways of contemplation or functioning in everyday life, certain features can be distinguished that are common in all traditions. Their appearance is very characteristic. They very rarely cut their hair or beard, which is why the most popular hairstyle among them is long, tied-up dreadlocks. They usually travel barefoot, dressed in a single sheet of cloth, although

10 Nonetheless, it should be remembered here that any literary descriptions or artistic attempts to depict Buddha were created long after his death; therefore, it is impossible to verify his actual appearance.

11 The word “avatar” in Sanskrit means descent or incarnation.

there are some who wear nothing but a small loincloth. Their bodies are usually emaciated, and many of them fast to maintain the highest level of concentration and to cleanse the negative karma accumulated in the past. *Sadhus* are generally held in great respect because it is believed that the ascetic and ritualistic practices they perform benefit not only them, but also the entire community to which they belong. Their appearance is the best evidence of their commitment to the practice.

Another important issue characteristic of Hinduism and, at the same time, very strongly connected with the body is the caste system, which for centuries determined not only the social roles of particular individuals, but also hierarchically ordered the entire social system. The etymology of the word “caste” is rooted in the Portuguese language, in which the word means lineage or race. For this reason, the first anthropologists and sociologists, describing the characteristics of caste divisions, often referred to physical differences. Looking at the caste system in more detail throughout India, one can distinguish three thousand castes and twenty-five thousand subcastes belonging to them, the numbers of which are very diverse. However, one of the most widespread divisions is the division into four *varnas*,¹² classifying the Hindu society in terms of origin, profession, and certain physical features. The caste at the highest in the hierarchy includes religious priests and scholars called *Brahmins*. The second in line are warriors and rulers called *kshatriyas*, at the next level there are the representatives of a caste called *vaishya*, to which merchants, traders, and farmers belong. The fourth caste called *sudras* includes the service population, among which were identified craftsmen, workers, servants, and slaves. The last identified social group not belonging directly to the *varnas*, but located outside the caste system, are people called untouchables – *ujdra*, which includes people with the highest degree of accumulation of negative impressions caused by their origin or professions (e.g., butchers) or eating habits (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2006). The caste system presented in this way became the center of interest of Max Weber, who believed that it was the key element of Hinduism (Weber 2006). Interestingly, he saw the basis of such a division in racial differences as he claimed that significant contrasts in physical appearance were one of the reasons for the creation of such strongly distinguished endogamous groups. In his considerations on the caste system, Weber identified something that he called clan charisma, explained as a certain inalienable quality (being a set of physical and social predispositions) attached to representatives belonging to a given clan (Weber 2006).

When we look at the legacy of the caste system in contemporary India, we can observe a complex network of dependencies, the origin of which is derived from the connection between religion and physicality, and the result still influences the politics and social life of the country today. Many contemporary Indian sociologists have tried to capture the condition of the caste concept in current social life and to characterize its multidimensional effects on the relations between institutions and citizens (see, e.g., Kothari 1970; Khare 2006).

12 In Sanskrit meaning class or color.

3. Key concepts

The body in Buddhism – is seen as a tool, the proper use of which through dedication to the practice of meditation, contemplation, and purification practices can lead its owner to liberation from the circle of suffering, the so-called *samsara*.

The body in Islam – the human body is the work of God; therefore, it is not sinful in nature. Since there is a risk that it will be used in an inappropriate way, it should be cared for in accordance with the principles described in the Quran.

The body as a tool of salvation – a concept promoted by Francis de Sales, who claimed that the body and soul are an integral whole that should be taken care of because it is the soul that has the chance to experience eternal happiness.

The body in Judaism – a broadly developed set of recommendations for dealing with the human body, ensuring that it is in good health. The Talmud contains guidelines on how to act properly so as not to pose any threat to oneself or others.

Yoga – a set of ascetic, physical, and contemplative activities used in India, the aim of which is for practitioners to experience spiritual perfection and clear states of consciousness. They shape the physical body, purify the mind, and help refrain from performing negative actions.

Kashrut – a set of rules related to the way of preparing and eating food practiced in Judaism, commonly called kosher rules.

Rites of passage – a theoretical concept concerning the rituals accompanying an individual in all the moments of the social transformation related to growing up, changing status, place, and social position.

Penitential practices (mortification) – a set of actions used, for example, in Christianity, constituting a remedy for the sinful actions of the human body.

Caste system – a hierarchical way of organizing the social system in India. In addition to the characteristics based on the idea of origin and profession, it often referred to certain physical features.

4. The most important studies

As was explained at the very beginning of the chapter, the area that deals with topics from the border of sociology of the body and religion has not yet been systematized in detail. However, this does not mean that there have been no studies

or publications that fit into this research field. Below are a few examples of studies from the intersection of cultural anthropology, medical sociology, and sociology of religion, which in an interesting way address the topic of the relationship between religion and the body.

The first example from anthropology is the flagship text by Horace Miner, which refers to the ritual bodily practices of the Nacirema tribe (Miner 1956). This text is an exemplification of a case study classic in cultural anthropology, intended to encourage anthropologists to self-reflect, to analyze academic interpretive practices used in the context of using the body as an example of “religious” practices, and Americans (hiding behind the anagram Nacirema devised by Miner) to think about their everyday adventures with the body. The text treats – parodically – Americans and their “devout” attitude to their own bodies, describing everyday hygienic and medical practices in the language of anthropological analysis of religious ritual.

The basic belief of the Nacirema is that man is trapped in an ugly body characterized by a natural tendency towards degeneration and death. The only way to oppose such fatal and unfavorable forces is to submit to and engage in ritual and magical practices. The Nacirema undergo such practices individually, in specially adapted rooms located in each house. Bathrooms – because that is what we are talking about here – are described in the category of private temples or chapels, where people can use magical substances and objects to perform daily ceremonies to protect them from old age, illness, and death. In the text, one can, therefore, find information about ablutions and acts of excretion, as well as practices such as shaving, described, however, as scraping the face with a sharp instrument – a masochistic tendency of the Nacirema people incomprehensible to an outside, non-cultural observer. We also find here an interesting description of healing practices carried out by medics in the so-called *latipso*.¹³

At other times they insert magic wands in the supplicant’s mouth or force him to eat substances which are supposed to be healing. From time to time the medicine men come to their clients and jab magically treated needles into their flesh. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill the neophyte, in no way decreases the people’s faith in the medicine men (Miner 1956: 506).

Another, more contemporary perspective on the human body in religious rites and rituals can be seen in the works of Randall Collins. In one of his publications, he referred to a micro-sociological perspective, while at the same time referring to interactionist theories, in order to consider the differences in ritual practices performed in Catholicism and Protestantism. As he has claimed, in order to be able to make an exhaustive comparison, it is necessary to analyze the role of priests and their bodies in services. In his analyses, he made a distinction between the body of the priest and the bodies of lay people, emphasizing their symbolic dimension. In Catholicism, he drew attention, for example, to the ceremonial vestments and the specially designated space in which priests could move, and to which lay people had

¹³ “Latipso” is also a partial anagram of the word for hospital.

no access. Above all, however, he has drawn attention to the symbolic dimension of the priest's body, which takes the form of a sacred object. As Collins has explained, a strong demarcation of space and an emphasis on the differences between the sacred body of the priest and the secular body of the faithful add sublimity to the performed ceremonies. A similar effect is brought about by the act of symbolically crossing boundaries during Holy Communion, when the priest uses his hand to pass the wafer to the mouth of the faithful. Emphasizing status differences as well as clear symbolic boundaries influences the creation and maintenance of a hierarchy, which directly translates into the participants' impressions and religious experiences. In the case of Protestant services, the symbolic dimension of the differences between the bodies of priests and lay people is reduced, the distance between these two groups decreases significantly. This applies to both the space in which the priests move (they are no longer physically separated by special barriers, an altar or lecterns – often all they need is a microphone) and the way they dress (ornate robes have been replaced with informal attire). The egalitarian nature of the performed rituals is completely different from Catholic ceremonies, but as a result, it leads to a similar effect – it stimulates and intensifies the religious experiences of the participants. To sum up, in Randal Collins' considerations, the body and its symbolic meaning given during religious rites become the object of analysis helping to define the nature of the performed rituals, as well as their hierarchical or egalitarian character (Collins 2010).

The third noteworthy issue is research devoted to the analysis of the relationship between body weight and religion. Although this topic has interested sociologists publishing in the "Journal of Religion and Health" for over two decades (see, for example, Yeary et al. 2018), the text by Deborah Lycett deserves special attention. She looked for a relationship between the body mass index (BMI) and the religiosity of residents of Great Britain over the age of 16. In her analyses, she wanted to verify whether there was a relationship not only between individual religiosity and body weight, but also whether it was possible to identify the influence of the religion practiced in a given geographical area. As it turned out, in counties where Catholics dominated, the BMI was lower, while in counties where conservative Protestantism was widespread, the BMI was higher. In her analyses, Lycett also attempted to characterize the healthy and unhealthy habits of the followers of different religions. She, therefore, analyzed the problems of smoking, alcohol consumption, and the frequency of physical exercise. Moreover, she also devoted attention to the activities carried out by the representatives of various religious movements working to combat obesity (Lycett 2014).

Another different perspective attempting to capture the relationship between the human body and religion appears in the research by Kathryn Rountree, a researcher of contemporary pagan beliefs. She has addressed the issue of shaping the body and the ways of self-presentation of the body during religious pilgrimages. One of her texts is devoted to the experiences of women participating in pilgrimages to holy places where pagan goddesses are worshipped. In her research and analysis, the author has drawn attention not only to the process of traveling and rituals

performed in places of worship but also to the way in which pilgrims transform their bodies and self-perception to become goddesses themselves. Rountree has devoted attention to women who belong to the so-called goddess movement and travel around Europe to visit various ancient places of worship, such as Stonehenge in England, Delphi in Greece, and Karnak in Egypt (Rountree 2002). She analyzed their journeys not only from a tourist and religious perspective, but also looked at how the pilgrimages they had undertaken affected the consciousness and psyche of the participants, how they helped them heal the “wounds” caused by living in a patriarchal world. According to the participants, such journeys helped them get closer to the forces of nature, which had healing properties that had a beneficial effect on both the body and the spirit. During an example journey to the caves in Crete, the participants united with the forces of the Earth, recalling the awareness of the past and the original order in which patriarchy did not dominate. Through the symbolic connection with the past and local goddesses, the pilgrimage participants experienced self-healing, strengthened their sense of self-worth, and, at the same time, stimulated their feminine qualities (Rountree 2002).

Another noteworthy issue is the therapeutic aspect of various religious practices. One scholar who tried to systematize and capture the relationship between psychophysical health and spiritual health was the American philosopher Gregory P. Fields. In a book published in 2001, he proposed an analytical model that enabled a systematic exploration of the relationship between health and religiosity in classical yoga, Ayurveda, and tantra. He was interested in the way pain was experienced, as well as the techniques for working with various physical and mental conditions (Fields 2001).

5. Summary

The issue of the human body in a religious context has not yet been discussed in an exhaustive and systematic way in either sociology of the body or the sociology of religion. However, this does not mean that anthropologists and sociologists do not deal with this issue. It is present in the analyses and reflections of both theoreticians and researchers, starting with the classics such as Émile Durkheim or Max Weber. However, it has not been the central point of their analyses. It often appears as a marginal or side topic. In the contemporary achievements of sociology and anthropology, the situation is somewhat different. Researchers analyzing the influence of religion on the human body and health, approach this topic in a more detailed and problematic way. They consider, for example, the relationship between religion and body weight (Lycett 2014) or the therapeutic aspects of individual religious practices (Fields 2001).

Taking a closer look at the relationship between the body and religion, one can identify a number of points of contact. Religion interferes with the human body on many levels. It shapes the individual and group perception of the human body,

assigning it different meanings. This happens in Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, but these concepts are not always permanent; they change and evolve along with cultural and social changes. An example can be the different narratives appearing in Christianity. In the Middle Ages, the human body was perceived as sinful and weak, leading to destruction, while in the Renaissance it was seen as pure and beautiful, embodying the work of God.

In addition, religions and the principles observed within their practice can also physically shape the appearance and physical condition of their followers. Specific values and related standards of behavior take the form of bodily regimes, which significantly discipline the bodies of the followers of given religions. In the Western world, the moment when we could observe a significant strengthening of control over the human body was the moment of the development of Protestant thought, in which the work ethic, the idea of self-renunciation, and vocation dominated.

When we look at body discipline practices performed in other religions, we can observe a different approach. In Hinduism and Buddhism, the purpose of ascetic practices or other secular activities disciplining the body and mind is to strengthen and add energy and clarity to the mind of the practitioners.¹⁴ In Judaism, the purpose of such practices is to commemorate certain important events and strengthen faith so that the practitioner does not get carried away by external temptations. In Islam, the largest set of restrictions observed during the holy month of Ramadan is to commemorate certain events, as well as to purify and improve the body of the follower.

Another important issue that should be summarized here is the role and meaning of the human body during ceremonies and rituals. Anthropologist Mary Douglas was one of the first to address this issue. In her analyses, she made one of the first attempts to characterize and typologize rituals, which, as she claimed, illustrated the norms and values shared in a society by means of control over the body or its absence. This has also been confirmed by the reflections of another anthropologist, Roy Rappaport, who, by focusing his attention on the role of the body of an individual participating in a ritual, accepts, reproduces and, at the same time, maintains the values and meanings played out during the ceremonies. The theoretical concept that deals with the human body in ceremonies and rituals is the theory of rites of passage developed by Arnold van Gennep (2019) and extended by Victor W. Turner (1977). Although the human body is not the direct addressee of their analyses, it is an entity that experiences transformation both on the symbolic and physical plane.

14 Such as following a vegetarian diet, practicing yoga, and practicing meditation.

6. Review questions

1. What is the function of the human body in religious rituals and ceremonies?
2. At what historical moment did the development of body discipline practices occur in the Western world?
3. Explain how the body is viewed in rites of passage.
4. How can we characterize the fundamental differences in the way suffering is viewed in Buddhism and Christianity?
5. Explain how the relics of saints are viewed in Christianity.

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