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Summary of PhD thesis:

**THE BODY GRAIL OF CHRIST. CHRISTIAN LIVING, THE WAY TO
RESTORATION OF BODY AND SOUL HEALTH**

Conducător de doctorat:

Arhiepiscop prof. univ. dr. habil. Irineu POP

Doctorand:

pr. Pocol (Tătar) Mihai Traian

Alba Iulia

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General introduction to the topic of the paper

In Orthodox Theology, man is seen to be the crown of divine creation, the being for whom God created the world, having the call to reach again the dimension of achieving likeness to Him. Man's efforts, both physical and especially spiritual, must be directed towards this goal. Man cannot reach the fulfillment of this ideal alone, this being the fruit of man's collaboration with God, being, therefore, a divine-human work. When man does not pursue this ideal, imbalance occurs in his being, and this state first brings suffering to the soul which, intensifying over time, can produce somatization. Man is called to respond to divine love through his own love, seeking to restore communion with God, by meeting God, thus developing a vivifying relationship with Him. In this process, just as God is fully engaged for every man, a full engagement is also required of man, both bodily and soulfully. The complete man, body and soul, is addressed to contribute to the restoration of communion with God. By approaching a life far from God, seeking only the satisfaction of ephemeral pleasures, life flowing without a transcendent purpose, shaped by nihilistic conceptions, man disfigures himself, loses the dignity with which God has honored him, namely that of being a unifier between the world seen and the unseen, and thus, deprived of the clear water of grace, he slowly loses the gift of health with which God has endowed him.

The present work aims to highlight a reality with deep implications in contemporary society, the causal relationship existing between sin and disease, trying to identify remedies for contemporary man, discovering what is the authentic human experience in order to enjoy health here, and in eternity of living together with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven. In my paper I will try to research in parallel the vision of suffering and illness, as well as the attitude regarding them, in theology and medicine. Due to the fact that the two fields of research are very vast, through the present work we want to take only a few bold steps in the sphere of relation between them, since we could not identify interdisciplinary research, from the moral perspective, between the two fields of research, lacking objective research in the medical field, based on quantifiable data.

I think a larger study on this topic is necessary and topical, because we can see how the number of sick people in hospitals increases, exponentially with the increase in religious laxity and trust in God. Not in the sense of the lack of faith in God as a transcendent entity far from the daily realities of people, but the weakening of faith, manifested by the lack of full engagement in living it. The world is becoming more and more secularized. Often faith and the relationship with God, for the contemporary man, is found on a secondary level, the man understanding the Christian life in a dual way: a time when he is with God (attending the Church; personal prayer), and the rest with the world or even alienating himself totally of God (atheists; non-religious). The assumption of research approaches also brings with them the heavy task of going through a vast and deep interdisciplinary bibliography: from biblical sources, to the tradition of the Church preserved in the Philokalia, also consulting an extensive bibliography in the field of medicine, many data from the medical field being identified in foreign bibliography, not yet translated into Romanian.

Through my research approach I intend to highlight the causal relationship between sin and physical diseases; the healthy relationship between theology and medicine, as well as what is the path that man is required to follow in order to restore or preserve the state of health both in his body and in his soul. The work is structured in three chapters which together constitute a manual of moral conduct for the suffering man, but not only. The first chapter brings to light the defining aspects of anthropology for the theme proposed as a hypothesis, discovering that man enjoyed a full state of health in the Garden of Eden, a state given by God and maintained through a full harmonization between man's free will, in conformity to receiving the life of love directed by God to him. At the same time, it presents the physical effects produced by the lapsarian sin, among which are suffering, disease and death. The second chapter parallels the medical and theological vision of health and illness, discovering that the authentic therapeutic work of the human being must integrate the priest, the doctor and the psychologist, the latter having a living spiritual - moral life, nourished by the sanctifying works performed by the Holy Spirit in the Church. The last chapter presents data from medical research, which confirms that certain practices that define the moral life of the members of the Church, influence the health of the human body and longevity, bringing, at the same time, scriptural and patristic arguments that attest that the practices related to spiritual life - morals described in this chapter, represent the nature of the Orthodox Christian life. Their evocation is a call to a spiritual revival, outlined by the milestones of the described practices, addressed to contemporary man, discovering the therapeutic values of deepening and living an authentic moral life. We consider these to be of crucial importance for the realities that contemporary man lives, disoriented, by losing the landmarks of his life, discouraged, full of himself, but increasingly empty of God, alienated by a voluntary wandering in

an existential desert, having a more and more rational thinking, in which the light of faith reaches more and more difficult, opacified in relation to the decryption of the mysteries of God, manifested in the nature of his existence. But even for this man, the North Star still shines in the sky, and the path to the port, often showing itself to be suffering, which can essentially transfigure the man.

Placing the work in a thematic field

Taking into account the chosen thematic field, Moral Theology, I selected as moral ideas that I approached: the lapsarian sin, the relationship between grace and freedom, the reception of the Eucharist, the symbiosis between ecclesial life, based on the fulfillment of moral laws, and the social life of the Christian and the prayer life. The ones listed are ideas that belong to the chosen field, Moral Theology, being reference themes in this theological topos. In the present work, they interfere with Spirituality, Patristics, Mysticism, Dogmatics, tangentially and with historical Theology. Since the research lends itself to the interference between the theological and medical universes, fragments can be identified in the work that can be found in medical fields such as Genetics, Neurotheology, Neurosciences, Cardiology, trying to offer a holistic vision on the therapeutics of the human being. Within the pages of the work, a multidisciplinary approach, both theological and medical, can be observed, which gives the argued ideas, as well as the thesis as a whole, support in demonstrating the hypothesis through which a true experiential theology is built.

The motivation for interdisciplinary research in the theological and medical fields lies in the desire to promote a holistic approach to the therapeutic process, which is becoming increasingly rare in the contemporary medical world, dominated by strong rationalist influences. The aim is to demonstrate that these two branches of knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but complement and enhance each other, given that spiritual and religious aspects can play a significant role in healing and patient care. In addition, it also seeks to identify and interpret relevant scientific findings in order to gain a deeper understanding of their implications for human life and the human condition in general.

When a Christian is confronted with scientific information, he is often prone to doubt. Therefore, it is essential that theologians in particular engage in the study of an interdisciplinarity between theology and science. This approach allows them to provide adequate and reasoned answers to those who face dilemmas, such as how to reconcile the Church's teaching that preaches God as the Being who created the whole world, and man, out of love, being absolute Good and Love plenary, and yet allows the beings created by Him to experience physical degradation, suffering, disease, death. It should be noted that the present research does not aim to offer an exhaustive reconciliation between the theological and

medical fields, being only a new launching pad for other research that can identify, starting from the new medical discoveries, arguments for reaffirming the naturalness of human life as Christocentric life, the only life that can give man authentic joy, life nourished in communion with the Mystical Body of Christ: the Church.

The aim and general objectives of the work

Considered contemporary society, globalizing, relativizing and secularizing trends can easily be identified, which tend, and sometimes even press, to be accepted as natural not only of human life, but also of the Church. At the same time, the fast-paced world in which we live, imprints the same desire for quick fulfillment and soul aspirations. Or this speed cannot lead to an authentic experience of faith, since a living interpersonal relationship requires silence and time to be strengthened, speed can only give rise to feelings, at most, and these, a sentimental faith. Difficult situations reconfigure the course of human life. One such situation is the experience of suffering. In suffering man discovers himself authentically. Consciously living the flow of moments, in suffering he receives sufficient motivation, to which he consents with his own freedom, towards a real existential transformation. In a world of falsehood and falsity, where suffering and disease are increasingly present, the need for authenticity is acute. All the more this need is identified in the spiritual life. In this order of ideas, the main purpose of the work is the revelation, before the contemporary man, of some moral principles, identified in the hesychast spirituality, which can shape for man, by assuming them, a new existential path based on spiritual and moral growth. This path leads to the acquisition of the state of essential health, identified in Christian spirituality with the attainment of perfection, since if the body experiences death, being curable or not, the soul is always curable. Taking into account the stated, the objective proposed in the first chapter of the work is an exposition, on historical, moral-ecclesiastical and social foundations, of the elements of anthropology. These will help us in identifying the sources of suffering, physical decay, disease and death that man experiences in the course of life in his person.

The objectives that we propose to argue in the content of the second chapter are multiple. A first objective is the exposition of the vision and approach of the human being, sufferings and diseases, on the one hand, from the perspective of the medical research field, and on the other hand, from the perspective of theology, aspects that determine the approach to the therapeutic act of the human being included of sufferings. Another objective is to decipher the spiritual meaning of suffering, in the temporal evolution of man. We will also carry out an analysis of some relevant texts, originating from the sources of faith, which discover what could be an approach to suffering, for a Christian, in

accordance with the moral norms established during the bimillennial existence of the Mystical Body of the Church, norms by which man can set himself on the path leading to healing. Another objective proposed in the second chapter is the discovery of the causal relationship between the choice of a life of cultivating passions and the birth of suffering in man.

In the last chapter of the work the main objective is to argue that a life conforming to the rigors of the Christian faith can be a way of rehabilitating mental and physical health. At the beginning of the chapter, the idea is reinforced that the defining practices for the ecclesial current of Hesychasm contribute to maintaining and restoring the state of bio-psycho-emotional health. The chapter continues by supporting the idea that the whole man is conformed to be a Chalice-bearer of Christ, to maintain life in his body and soul after the fall, throughout the ages of history, through the continuous sharing of man receiving abundant life, from the Life of Christ. The Eucharist is for man and a meal on the way to the acquisition of the Kingdom of Heaven. The chapter ends with the reiteration and highlighting of Christian moral principles as existentially natural for contemporary man.

Research stage

In the act of healing, man must be approached in a holistic way, integrating both the physical and spiritual dimensions. Such an interdisciplinary approach, from the studied bibliography, can be found in theological specialty works, being encountered quite sporadically in works originating from the results of current medical research. The novelty of the present paper is the symbiosis of recent research in the fields of medicine, such as: genetics, neurology, cardiology, nutrition, with practices characteristic of Christian living. These demonstrate that the hesychastic practices acquire important medical values, confirming that the moral life, encouraged and modeled in the Church, through participation in its life, constitutes an important impulse favorable to preserving or restoring health.

Being a research at the intersection of two scientific universes, the medical and the theological, it was necessary to consult a vast bibliography from the two fields of research. We will mention only the authors whose writings have significantly contributed to the argument presented, both in a national and international context. Since the work does not aim to adopt an interfaith approach, I have investigated authors from the Orthodox space in particular. In Romanian, apart from a rich bibliography of works translated from other languages, we also find contributions by some Romanian authors. Revelatory for the anthropological implications presented, were the works: Irineu Pop, *The Face of Christ in the Christian's Moral Life*, a book that offers an in-depth exposition of the teaching of the Orthodox faith on anthropology, encouraging the Christian to assume, as a personally addressed call,

the achievement of the moral elevation of the whole being, from the dignity of being the image of Christ, to reaching his likeness. This process is accomplished under the dome of the Church, through the work of Sanctifying grace, imparted to man through the Holy Mysteries. Another relevant work for the treated subject is the work, published in two volumes, by Deacon Adrian Sorin Mihalache: *The Light of the Unseen: a theological look into the rationality of creation and recent scientific theories about the Universe*, a work that parallels scientific discoveries from the medical world, with the truths contained and exposed in the *Sources of Faith*, which continue to be current, and for contemporary man. Also, a work that appeared as the fruit of a thorough scientific research, with the objective of offering a Christian answer regarding the arguments evoked by the researchers who support the evolutionist theory, is the work that bears as its title the question that motivated the entire scientific research: *Does evolutionism have scientific evidence?* whose author is Ioan Bute.

From the Western theological works, which were also translated into Romanian theology, an important book for the present work is *The Holy Fathers on the origins and destiny of man*, by Alexandros Kalomiros. From our research, we believe that it is Sergei Bulgakov who has developed a balanced research on the relationship between evolution and the truths of Scripture regarding creation, in the work *Bride of the Lamb*. In this work, Bulgakov, on the one hand, supports the facts presented in the *Book of Creation*, but on the other hand, he also recognizes an "approximate and relative veracity" of the scientific description of the evolution of the world.

Among the works originating from the universe of medical research significant for the elaboration of the present paper are: *The miracle of telomeres*, which belongs to Dr. Elisabeth Blackburn. It analyzes from a medical perspective, the effect of certain habits and practices on the length and quality of life. However, the spiritual perspective is very vaguely treated. Numerous studies, carried out in renowned university centers such as Oxford, Cambridge or the University of California, which can be found in the bibliography of the mentioned book, confirm spiritual practices that accompany and enhance the healing process.

In Romanian theology, the interdisciplinary researches of Adrian Sorin Mihalache are known, contained in the book *You are what you live*, in which he highlights recent data from neuroscience, which confirms practices that have long entered into the life of the Church, through the phillocalic thesaurus. A moral theology applied to people in suffering is presented to us in his books and studies by Doctor Bogdan Chiorean, as well as the collection cared for by him, *Doctors and the Church*. From the medical field, although timid appearances in relation to the vast universe of medical research, Doctor Pavel Chirilă stands out, who, in his writings, outlines the reality of the fact that engaging in the integral living of faith is fundamental in maintaining or restoring health. Among the works that belong

to him, we mention the books: Healing; Meditations on biblical medicine, as well as Psychology in the texts of the Holy Fathers. Another important work, originating from an "apologist" of the practice of fasting, but who belongs to the medical environment, Doctor Florea Damaschin, who, in the work Price of healing, brings solid arguments in favor of Christian fasting.

From foreign theology, we mention the authors Konstantin V. Zorin, with the works: Alleviation of bodily suffering through spiritual means; Steps to recovery: Get up and walk. A remarkable theologian for the problem of suffering, diseases, as well as for identifying a deep meaning, acceptable to man, is the theologian Jean Claude Larchete. From his vast work we mention: The meaning of the body in Orthodoxy; Theology of disease; The Christian in the face of illness, suffering and death; Therapeutics of spiritual diseases; Therapeutics of mental illnesses. Another significant work for the present work is Corpul Săvit – practical phenomenology starting from the Philokalia and the Fathers of the Church, which belongs to Natalie Depraz. Last but not least, an author who expressed through his writings, the concern regarding the inter-conditioning between soul and body, is the Hierarch Ierotheos Vlachos. From his writings we mention the books Orthodox Psychotherapy, as well as Illness and healing of the soul in the Orthodox tradition.

What constitutes the novelty of the present paper is the utilization of some research carried out in the United States, in the field of neuro-imaging, which confirms the interrelationship between the physical state experienced by man and a series of spiritual practices, from which, in our paper, we have selected those that I also find it in Orthodox spirituality. The author who coordinated this research, psychiatrist Harold G. Koenig, showed a special interest in this relationship, his research extending over a period of more than two decades. Among the volumes coordinated by him, which we studied for the preparation of this work, we list: Spirituality in patient care; The link between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and the Faith Factor. The most notable researches of the aforementioned author are the volumes The handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health, as well as Religion and Spirituality in Psychiatry.

Research method

Contemporary medicine gives us a detailed perspective on life and humanity under the sign of species evolution. Starting from this finding, we propose to analyze the possible relationships between this worldview, derived exclusively from the interpretation of current scientific knowledge, expressed through various philosophical opinions, and the theological approach, which is based on the biblical

teachings about creation. This analysis will ultimately lead us to a reflection of an anthropological nature.

Continuing these reflections, we will explore in parallel, the medical and theological perspectives on illness and suffering, in order to identify the specificity of each field of research. The research method used in this work is a comprehensive and integrative one, which tries to provide a deep and balanced understanding of the relationship between the physical, psychological and spiritual health of man. By combining theological and medical analysis, the work aims to demonstrate that the holistic approach to health is not only possible, but also essential for an authentic and fulfilling life, in line with Christian moral and spiritual principles. In the work we will follow the support and argumentation, with both medical and especially theological evidence, of a model of holistic, integrative therapy, which combines the care of the body with the care of the soul, with the aim of leading man to the true state of health, identified in Church tradition as the state of deification.

Limits of research

An important limitation in the research undertaken is the in-depth lack of knowledge from the medical field, the lack of medical studies that constituted an obstacle in the contact with medical personnel through which a case study-based research could be undertaken. For future research at the confluence of the two fields of research, I consider the dialogue between the representatives of medicine and theology imperatively necessary. However, the theological fluency of the work did not suffer because such researches were identified in specialized works from foreign medical literature that can constitute solid arguments for the evoked hypotheses. However, I believe that a research of this kind would be important, since the work is addressed to the Romanian environment, having as subjects people who come from among the Romanian population and more specifically from among the Romanian Orthodox Christians since each person has certain cultural, social and religious peculiarities. The medical research used in the paper did not address these aspects.