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***Sickness, suffering, healing –
a theological-medical approach***

Summary

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PHD THESIS SUMMARY

The exceptional advances in medicine of the last decades have facilitated its interpenetration in all the key moments and intimate aspects of life and its end. Never as now has the question of the "game of God" and "youth without old age" been so acutely raised, so that these advances are today the object of study not only of medicine, but also of philosophy, law and theology, which led to the emergence of a new discipline, bioethics, aimed at analyzing the morality of medical interventions.

Medical technologies idealize biological existence and produce new hopes for man, pushing him towards an illusory space of omnipotence and moral autonomy, responding to man's everlasting need for more power, knowledge and freedom. The place of spiritual values was taken over by pseudo-values such as power and individualism, pomp, ambition, pride, parvenirea without right, these demonstrating a substitution of the eternal with the ephemeral, of the inner with the economic, of the asceticism with the satisfaction and frantic search for pleasures, of the affective sensibility with the metallic and cold character of the technical civilization. Entering into the depth of these characteristics of postmodernity, we notice that the relational life is becoming more and more oppressive, that man seeks to get rid of any constraints,

without submitting to anyone and anything, and from the hardships of life and the human condition man tries to escape at any cost, costs and consequences.

As scientific advances in the medical field have provided a vast field of investigation and therapy, the relationship between doctor, patient, medical science and society undergoes considerable transformations. Practices such as genetic engineering, embryo conservation, organ transplantation, physiological limits of human life and being are just some of the problems that the doctor has to respond to today, to get involved, to take risks.

The crisis and conflicts in contemporary medical technology also have their explanation in the separation of reason from faith, in the exclusive focus on human biology and technical-scientific progress, leading to the relativization of moral and religious perspectives, thus outlining two different directions of research: secular bioethics and Christian bioethics. Obviously, the one that responds to the spiritual needs of postmodernity and goes beyond the material framework and the abusive importance of the body, of the earthly life and of the external transformations is the second one, on which I will also focus in the argumentation of my doctoral thesis.

Structured in five chapters and supported by a research in the practical part, this paper wants to investigate to what extent the postmodern man, who has a wide range of thaumaturgical or pseudo-healing resources, relates to the two sciences (religion and

medicine) as different disciplines in order to achieve healing or, on the contrary, as complementary and useful to the one in distress.

The necessity of the approached theme is imposed by the transformations of the postmodern society, in which man as an image of God carries out his existence and which causes him little by little a change in mentality, attitude and action. Rational knowledge has given postmodern man the illusion that he has mastered more and more segments of the mysteries of life, of his external power, but this does not mean a science without conscience, an annulment of moral duties regarding the application of technological results within certain limits, or the omission of the divine role in the act of healing. A higher scientific knowledge also entails greater responsibility.

The motivation for choosing the present theme demonstrates not only the importance and actuality of the subject, but also the necessity of achieving a dialogue between Christian theology and medical science in understanding human suffering throughout history and in the life of man. The intersection of religion with medicine has much to gain in terms of the treatment of somatic disease, but it has certainly also aroused controversy regarding the biological and spiritual life of man. The behavioral and moral dilemmas we face and the medical and scientific technologies that appear rapidly in the twenty-first century are complex and require deep analysis. Much of what is and will be available to doctors as a

result of medical research are great benefits for mankind. Modern medicine gives us access to the wonders that people thousands of years ago could not have imagined in their wildest dreams -such as surgeries, transplants, etc. On the other hand, the medical frontier becomes a slippery slope when research and medical practices turn out to be in strong opposition to the basic principles of the Christian Church and its teachings. Therefore, a characteristic direction of the beginning of the XXI century is represented by the need for bioethics for the postmodern man who conceives his life without God, who refuses death and suffering and strives to overcome them with the power and means of modern science and technology.

The interdisciplinary scientific study between theology and medicine is relatively recent, with more and more theologians trying today an approach that favors the development of a perspective in the struggle with human suffering, looking for the sources of healing not only in medical science and practice, but especially in prayer and at the healing Mysteries of the Church, through physician and priest alike.

The tendency in Orthodox thinking is to see scientific medicine and the spiritual dimension of the well-being of the human person from a holistic perspective. Man is seen as a totality of reality, as a microcosm of God's creation in the process of deification on the basis of this affinity with God. The soul and the body are not two

separate entities, but spiritual and physical elements of the same being.

In the scientific literature we often find a one-sided perspective of disease and suffering: either they are treated from a medical point of view, or theologically. It is being tried today to find a point of intersection of the two complementary fields, so that the resulting dialogue is beneficial to the suffering man, be he sick bodily or spiritually, in his quest to regain his health on the path of medicine and/or the Church. Through the prism of this dialogue, medical institutions acquire the value of space of interference between medical technique and the virtue of faith, and parishes of hospitals and clinics of souls, while monasteries of intensive care units of orthodoxy. Any priest is equipped to provide a basic treatment: the Holy Mysteries, especially confession, communion and mass, the canon of prayer, the anointing with chrism, spiritual guidance, counseling and catechesis, etc. However, he should not be substituted for the professional doctor in the scientific act of human healing and postponing death.

Therefore, this work involves and requires an interdisciplinary approach, through a biblical and patristic substantiation, but also through the elaboration of a methodology based on the analysis of information coming from the intersection of medicine, psychology, bioethics, anthropology, history and philosophy.

Throughout the thesis I wanted to prove that the Christian Church has been a healing community since its inception, and healing has been an essential aspect of preaching. Within and through the Church, where the grace of the Holy Spirit is present and worker, healing, regaining health, patience in troubles, joy of life, salvation are worked. Through the activities carried out by the medical and theological staff (the doctor, the biologist, the pharmacist, the nurse, the priest) through which the Holy Spirit works, it comes to highlighting the joy of life. The Holy Mysteries, within the reach of the Christian, have a great therapeutic power by combining them with prayer, fasting, participation in the cultic life and the fulfillment of Christian virtues. The separation between the work of the doctor and the divine one in achieving healing is completely erroneous. The sufferer receives healing through medical science as a blessing of God. The prophets and righteous of the Old Testament, like the apostles and saints of the New Testament, understood and confirmed by their own experience that when one is healed, that is, when he is freed from selfishness, he acquires love for God and fellowmen, and receives the grace of God, a place is revealed in his heart, where a movement is felt, a divine joy, an intense spiritual desire.

The thesis also discusses the theology of disease and how we understand that the disease is a part of the fallen world, as part of the corrupt universe, in which the Christian finds himself forced to

reflect on the purpose for which God has ordained the suffering he faces and how his medical goals align with His will. In this regard, we have also examined the causes of human suffering, using as case studies the life and experience of several significant biblical characters.

Last but not least, the research undertaken at the end of the work reveals that the majority of the investigated population sees medicine as a gift offered to man by the Deity in the context of the precariousness of the earthly life, as a support of a human nature subject to disease, suffering and death through the fall into sin, but also emphasizes the necessity of the Church to further develop a healing program that expresses a neopatristic synthesis in which the different disciplines of medicine, Psychology and religion can be encouraged to express the clinical service in the church and in which faith guides the lives of individuals in the healing profession.

The present work has no claim to exhaust the treated problem, given the extension, the importance of the theme for the mission of the Church and the new researches in the context of human healing, but it wants to remind the postmodern man of the idea that medical science is favorable, it is a gift offered to man by God to a biological existence subject to fall and precariousness, but this quality is attributed to him by the value that man gives him. God is the absolute Healer, the Great Physician without whom healing is not possible, and the source of all cures and healing. In an increasingly

secularized society, marked by a spiritual crisis characteristic of human civilization, it is especially necessary for the Church to emphasize the significance of the sacredness of life. The Orthodox tradition, shaped by the experience of Christian truths in practice, is the bearer of spirituality and ascetic ethos, which must be especially encouraged in postmodernity.