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The Healing of the Sick as a Charismatic Value of the Church

Abstract

Through original sin, man lost his spiritual balance, being compelled to struggle for his own existence and socio-spiritual development. Although the relationships between man and God have deteriorated, divine Providence has continuously and discreetly worked upon man, ensuring his survival and a progressive understanding of spiritual relationships with the divinity, necessary for his restoration as a process of deification. Through the sharing of grace, man has the chance to triumph over illnesses and, especially,



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over death, which elevates him beyond the context of the animal kingdom surrounding him on earth, beyond the condition of perishability and mortality.

Keywords

life, existence, grace, sin, restoration, communion, deification

1 Introduction

God created the world and man not out of personal necessity, but solely due to His love, to provoke coexistence and spiritual communion, in a continuous sharing of this noble sentiment between the Creator and creation. The purpose of creation involves a permanent and necessary exchange of love within it, among people as free individuals, and between man and nature,¹ so that man may be capable of generating the love that must be offered to God.

Due to the necessity of generating love, as a noble and uplifting sentiment towards perfection, man was not created as a simple individual, but in a bipolarity, man and woman, who complement and support each other in a coexistence and communion absolutely necessary for returning the love of the other², to offer it

¹ "God did not create everything solely for our needs, but also out of His generosity, so that we, seeing the unspeakable richness of His creations, might marvel at the power of the Creator and understand that all these were brought into existence with unspeakable wisdom and goodness, for the honour of the man who was to be made." Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Facere*, 7, 5, apud Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *Cartea Facerii, Crearea lumii și omul începuturilor*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, p. 93.

² "The Lord God also endowed Eve with the same wisdom, the same strength and omnipotence, as well as all other good and holy attributes."

simultaneously to the Creator and the surrounding world. In the paradisiacal state, which involved spiritual and bodily balance, man had a strong tendency towards communion with God and with the nature surrounding him, feeling that this was his home and his well-being.³ Man was placed "... as an immortal emperor in an incorruptible world, that is, not only in paradise but in the whole earth under the sky."⁴ In this happy communion, he needed communication to express his thoughts, a condition for the stability of an ever-closer communion with God and his fellow men, for which he received the ability to speak, an expression of his communal nature.⁵

Man was placed in Paradise "first as a school and a place of learning for human souls, then... [in this world] as a suitable dwelling for all those subject to birth and decay."⁶ But until then, man was in a high spiritual and moral state, capable of growing ever more towards the likeness of God,⁷ a state "... somewhat between the heavenly, where only the spiritually pure can dwell, and the corruptible earth – which appeared, as we shall see, due to his fall."⁸ Adam and Eve were to give birth to an entire human race full of interpersonal love with God, with people, and with creation, without knowing biological death. The Tree of Life, through its fruits, was to ensure their state of immortality (Genesis 2:16).

Xxx, *Viața și învățămintele Sfântului Serafim de Sarov, Mănăstirea Slătioara*, 1995, p. 78.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1978, p. 140.

⁴ Sf. Simeon Noul Teolog, *Discursuri teologice și etice. Scrieri I, Discursul 1;2*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 1998, p.117.

⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

⁶ Sf. Vasile cel Mare, *Omilii la Hexaemeron*, Omilia I-a, 5, trad. Pr. Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Sofia, București, p. 20.

⁷ Pr. Prof. Athanase Negoită, *Istoria religiei Vechiului Testament*, Ed. Sophia, București, 2006, p. 36.

⁸ Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *Cartea Facerii, Crearea lumii și omul începuturilor*, Ed. Sofia, București, 2006, p. 116.

2 The Illness of Man and the Appearance of Death

The serpent's work of temptation jeopardised the natural development of paradisiacal man, exploiting the weakness of the soul faced with diversity and doubt. The serpent addressed the woman with great cunning, knowing that her destabilisation would, due to her coexistence and communion with Adam, lead to the fall of both. The next consequence was, naturally, the destruction of communion with God and the perfectly balanced nature of the Garden⁹ of Eden.

Sin was committed and communion with God was disrupted precisely because Adam and Eve desired to forcibly become like God, believing they could know good and evil in a detached manner. They chose "the path through the knowledge of death and life, in other words, of created reality."¹⁰ Thus, sin darkened the image of God in man, exposing him to biological degradation and, consequently, to death, precisely due to the diminishment of divine grace, as uncreated divine energy, upon which man sadly realises he is totally dependent, not being an autonomous being. The rule of biological degradation and death, as a universal law, was transmitted to all people along with original sin (Romans 5:12, 14, 17-19, 21).¹¹

Death, in its proper sense, means the process of the soul's separation from the body, so that each constitutive part of man embarks on a different journey: the soul goes to God's judgement and receives its due reward, while the body accelerates its biological degradation to return to the elementary physical forms

⁹ παραδεισος – "paradise, a term of Persian origin denoting a park intended for royal walks and relaxation", xxx Septuaginta, vol. 1, Ed. Polirom 2004, p. 57.

¹⁰ Nikolaos Matsoukas, *Teologie dogmatică și simbolică*, IV, *Demonologia*, Editura Bizantină, 2002, București, p. 90.

¹¹ Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dicționar al Noului Testament*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1995, p. 327.

from which it was constituted. Due to the commission of sin, which jeopardises the presence, effect, and even expels divine grace, people have observed the phenomenon of diseases intruding into the human body, irreversibly disrupting its proper functioning, and have adapted to the sad and painful reality of the inevitability of death.

The initial paradisiacal goodness and balance are no longer found, “because Adam’s state in Paradise was the natural state of man.”¹² The desire for personal protection, domination and preservation of life led to an existentially selfish manner, with man closing himself off spiritually in his circle of life, killing the potential for love in favour of the instinct for preservation and survival at any cost, causing God to observe, “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagining of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). It is thus observed that people surprisingly easily abdicate from the principles of religious communion with God if the examples of the surrounding world and social coexistence itself sometimes exert strong attractions towards other “*fulfilments*” that mask sin, earthly fulfilments that, in fact, only mislead and distract the soul from its primary purpose.

However, the source of evil and human suffering has not been forgotten. The image of the serpent as a representative of evil opposed to God and His creation has marked humanity’s view of the supernatural world. God ensured that there would be a revenge of humanity upon the serpent, again through a woman, who would crush its head this time (Genesis 3:15). People understood that there was an enemy who opposed them, who caused evil and suffering in the world, exploiting human weaknesses, both spiritual and especially physical, the integrity and proper functioning of the human body. For this reason, in many

¹² Ieromonah Serafim Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

ancient civilisations, it was considered that some diseases appeared due to the presence of negative supernatural forces, “*unclean spirits*” that made people sick¹³, a belief formulated since prehistory.¹⁴

The idea of the existence of “*demons*” capable of causing bodily and spiritual illnesses was encountered in Antiquity throughout the Roman Empire, but also in other cultural spaces (the Mesopotamian world, or even further geographically, the Indian Atharva-Veda),¹⁵ pointing to a common heritage of the human vision regarding a sad reality of their own existence, that of diseases and, ultimately, death.

3 The Steps of Divinity in Restoring Man as Spiritual Healing

The gracious work of the Holy Spirit upon creation in general and upon people in particular is known before the establishment of the Church, even from the Old Testament period. The first book of the Holy Scriptures, *Genesis*, conveys a key piece of information regarding the existential substrate of the world, namely, its creation from nothing, proving that the world does not have an independent material substrate. It can maintain its existence only in direct connection to and dependence on the Creator. And what is planted by God is worthy of His care, with man constituting the main objective of particular Divine Providence.

The wise Jesus Sirach would meditate on the human existential condition:

¹³ Nicolae Achimescu, *Istoria și filosofia religiei la popoarele antice*, Editura Tehnopress, Iași, 2000, p. 73.

¹⁴ Ovidiu Drâmba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, Vol I, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1985, p. 25.

¹⁵ Diac. prof. dr. Emilian Vasilescu, *Istoria Religiilor*, Ed. IBMBOR, București 1987, pP. 279, 202.

“The Lord created man out of earth and turned him back to it again. He gave men a few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds... He set his eye upon their hearts to show them the majesty of his works. And he said to them, ‘Beware of all unrighteousness.’ And he gave commandment to each of them concerning his neighbour... Afterward he will arise and requite them, and he will bring their recompense on their heads” (Sirach 17:1-4, 11-12, 18).

This text reflects the awareness of the necessity of a moral, principled balance between man and God, encompassing both the information regarding divine requirements given as a chance for liberation from the condition of sin, and the moral obligation of man, responsible through his own conscience before God. Man must understand that God awaits his return to goodness, not obliging him in any way,¹⁶ even if, for now, he is spiritually in the state of sin (Psalm 32:13-15).

“The divine hypostasis of the incarnate Son and the divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit in their work in us take into account the specificity of each of us, leaving us as distinct hypostases, just as the hypostases of the Holy Trinity are distinct.”¹⁷

Before the outpouring of grace into the world at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), God manifested His power and will in the world in a special way, in various circumstances, by performing certain miracles, meant to anticipate the great plan of man’s salvation. These include: the parting of the waters (the Red Sea; Exodus 14, or the Jordan; Joshua 3; IV Kings 2:14), the bursting forth of water from the rock (Exodus 17:6), the infusion of strength in battle (Joshua

¹⁶ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Radu, *Îndrumări misionare*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1986, p. 215.

¹⁷ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op. cit.* 215.

10:8-9), the collapse of the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:12-20), the closing of the heavens to prevent rain for a certain time (III Kings 17:1), the invocation of fire from heaven (III Kings 18:38), resurrections from the dead (III Kings 17:20-22; IV Kings 4:33-35) and many other examples recorded in the Old Testament, as free manifestations of divine power and will throughout the history of the Jewish people, with a well-determined purpose of fulfilling a much higher divine plan.

In fact, throughout this historical stage, until the event of Pentecost, God prepared the world through people endowed with grace in a special way, to transmit to their fellows the revelation of certain divine mysteries. In extraordinary circumstances, divine Providence intervened within creation directly, through wonderful, supernatural deeds¹⁸, revealing divine mysteries or performing miracles with a profound and eloquent spiritual content, through certain people.¹⁹

The abundant outpouring of divine grace at Pentecost was explicitly anticipated by the prophet Joel, eight centuries before the coming of the Messiah²⁰, through a prophecy:

“I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see vision; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit.” (Joel 3:1-2).

¹⁸ This possibility is due to God's freedom of will and action according to the counsel of His will, not being limited or determined by any rule or temporal work, such as the moment of Pentecost.

¹⁹ Pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Radu, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁰ Pr. prof. dr. Vl. Prelipceanu, Pr. prof. N. Neaga, Pr. prof. Gh. Barnea, *Studiul Vechiului Testament*, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1985, p. 218.

This gracious outpouring was announced as an essential change in human nature, as a blessed time with spiritual gifts and wonderful signs,²¹ surpassing the ordinary condition of human existence, as a triumph of life over diseases and death.

4 The Healing of Man through the Incarnate Divine Son

At the “*fullness of time*”, the Son of God dwelt among men to bring about the great spiritual transformation of humanity. Human nature was to be elevated to the highest level of its dignity, union with God. The plan of salvation was established by divine wisdom, revealed to humans only to the extent that it did not jeopardise the strategy of action. Human nature had to be raised again to the high standard of communion with divinity through purification, redemption, and sanctification. A sacrificial redemption, involving the sacrifice of blood to counterbalance sin. And the Resurrection had to conquer death as the only possibility of healing human nature through grace.

Anticipating the triumph of life over death, the entire public ministry of the Saviour was marked by gracious manifestations, meant to foreshadow the great Victory, through actions of saving certain people from the state of spiritual and physical illness, from demonic possession and even from the “jaws” of death. Confirming the ancestral vision regarding diseases that appeared as a result of the presence of unclean spirits,²² the Saviour forgives sins, heals, exorcises, and raises the dead with divine power, the Holy Gospels offering numerous examples of this reality.

²¹ Pr. drd. Valeriu Drăgușin, “Harismele în viața Bisericii primare după epistolele Sf. Ap. Pavel”, in ST, no. 5-6/1989, p. 53.

²² Ovidiu Drâmba, op. cit., p. 25.

The Lord healed all “those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics and paralytics” (Matthew 4:24) both spiritually and physically, in season and out of season, but with innocent ease. In Capernaum, “when evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to Him, and He drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (Matthew 8:16). “A man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke” (Matthew 9:32-33). Similarly, “a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute” was healed (Matthew 12:22). The demon-possessed man from Gadara, exorcised by the Saviour, returned to human normality and mental integrity; later, the townspeople found this man, “who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15). The daughter of the Canaanite woman, who was tormented by a demon, is freed by a divine word, at a distance, and the expulsion of the demon is perceived as a healing (*θεραπευειν*) (Matthew 15:22, 28). An unclean spirit had seized a child, throwing him to the ground, making him gnash his teeth, stiffen, remain mute and foam at the mouth; the demon being cast out, the child became healthy (Mark 9:17-18). Such examples are numerous, people now better understand the connection between sin, the personified presence of evil, disease, and death, as undeniable evidence of the presence and work of evil in the world (Acts 12; 19, 21-23).

Beyond concrete actions against the devil and diseases, the Saviour showed particular attention to the need for people to be spiritually freed from their state of sin. He Himself demonstrated this power before the Pharisees who had contested Him, reproaching them for their stubbornness: “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” (Matthew 9:6). The demonstration in Capernaum emphasises precisely the connection between sin and disease, the spiritual state of the soul directly and necessarily determining the condition of

the body's biological functioning. And the lesson is repeated in the case of the person with paralysis at Bethesda ("See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you," John 5:14), or the man born blind ("... 'who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him'," John 9:2-3).

And, because the salvation of people would individually depend on the forgiveness of personal sins, the Saviour granted the power to forgive sins to His disciples, with validity in heaven as on earth (Matthew 16:18; 18:18), disciples specially prepared for this mission of saving fallen humanity: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:22-23).

The resurrections from the dead performed by the Saviour upon Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9:23-25), the young man from Nain (Luke 7:11-15) or Lazarus (John 11:44) confirm the fundamental desire of the Son of God to oppose sin and death that dominate humanity, offering true life to those who understand the meaning of their own existence, that is, a life full of love and adherence to God.

All these actions of the Saviour, the forgiveness of sins, healings and resurrections from the dead, were meant to assure people that indeed, Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Son of God, is truly "the resurrection and the life," and "the one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

5 The Charismatic Power Granted to the Church

The spiritual connection between man and God was restored through the love of God "that has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). This manifestation of God's love for humanity materialised in the

spiritual energy necessary for our salvation, called *grace* (*χάρις*), “divine grace, or the gift of God,”²³ which flows from the divine Being of God, remaining inseparable from its source.

When we speak fundamentally about grace as uncreated divine energy, which flows through God’s will and work in the world for the healing and ennobling of creation, we also encounter in the Holy Scripture the term rich in connotations “*charism, charisms*” (*χαρισμα*, a term found 17 times in the New Testament, predominantly in the writings of Apostle Paul, but also in those of Apostle Peter).

In many Pauline texts, the term *χαρισμα* is synonymous with *χάρις*, an application explained by the fact that *χαρισμα* has an unlimited sense, designating all the gifts of God offered to believers.²⁴

- In 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31 and Romans 12:6, the term *χαρισμα* is understood as a spiritual gift containing wonderful powers manifested outwardly.
- In Romans 5:15-16, 6:23, it is synonymous with *χάρις*, showing the divine grace of salvation through Christ.
- In 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, it designates the special grace of priesthood, or grace as a status, which is the fruit of this Holy Sacrament.
- In 1 Corinthians 7:7; 2 Corinthians 1:11, Romans 1:11, 11:29, 1 Peter 4:10, the term *χαρισμα* indicates various general or special gifts received from God,

²³ Pr. dr. Ioan Mircea, op. cit., p. 205.

²⁴ Pr. drd. Valeriu Drăgușin, op. cit., p. 52.

which can also be shared by the apostles (Romans 1:11).²⁵

Receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Holy Apostles were the first charismatics of the early Church. On that day, “suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:2-4). In preparation for this moment, the Saviour had warned the Apostles: “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49).

For the Holy Apostles, familiar with the divine manifestations from the Old Testament, where divine intervention often occurred in a supernatural manner as a concrete fact,²⁶ and having themselves experienced temporary cooperation with grace through the miracles they performed (Matthew 10), the event of the visible descent of the Holy Spirit “provoked more gratitude than surprise,”²⁷ as they were already aware of the supernatural and responsible mission to which they were called.

The endowment of the Apostles with charismatic power and, through them, of the entire Church, constituted as a consequence

²⁵ Diac. prof. dr. Nicolae Nicolaescu, pr. dr. Grigore Marcu, pr. dr. Sofron Vlad, pr. dr. Liviu Munteanu, *Studiul Noului Testament*, Ed. IBMBOR, București 1982, p. 93 și Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Arheologie Chretienne et de Liturgie*, Tome 3, Part 2, Editura Letouzey et Anne, Paris 1913, p. 581.

²⁶ “The phenomenon of the wind, whose origin was mysterious to the ancients, often represented for the Israelites the symbol of life-giving power, of God’s creative and judicial work.” Dr. Constantin Preda, *Credința și viața Bisericii primare. O analiză a Faptelor Apostolilor*. Doctoral Thesis, *Studii Teologice*, nr. 1-2, January-June, 2002, p. 88.

²⁷ Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq, op. cit., Tome 3, Part 2, 1913, p. 580.

of the descent of the Holy Spirit, depended solely on the will and plan of God, becoming a living reality of His cooperation with man for his spiritual and physical healing, that is, for the victory of life over death.

The gifts of the charismatics had a unique purpose: “the manifestation of the Spirit (always remaining unseen), for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7), which strengthened faith among Christians and non-Christians. Some charisms acted through a natural manifestation of man, without being spectacular in gestures and reactions, such as the gift of wisdom, knowledge, salvific exhortations, faith, love, evangelism, Christian mercy, and discernment of spirits.

Other charisms, however, such as exorcism, glossolalia, the gift of prophecy, miracle-working faith, interpretation of tongues, gifts of healing, manifested vividly in a spectacular public manner, externalising the special work of grace that does not belong to man, depending, of course, on the will of the same Holy Spirit. These charisms constituted, for any person, visible and undeniable signs and proofs of the unseen work carried out by divine grace upon believers.

The spiritual gifts working in the world were promised to the Church by the Saviour Jesus Christ through the words addressed to the Holy Apostles:

- “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:12-14).
- “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:38).
- “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will

place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mark 16:17-18).

6 The Healing of Souls and Bodies

The book “*Acts of the Apostles*” describes the life of Christians, stating that: “Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the Apostles” (Acts 2:43). These “wonders and signs” were not new to the Apostles, as they had the power to perform them during their trial mission, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and exorcising demons (Matthew 10:8). However, now the charismatic abundance was greater and more diverse, enabling the Apostles to perform miracles, being endowed with a special, charismatic faith, or the charism of healing any disease and the gift of working miracles (1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28).

All three of these charisms were closely connected, the latter two being built upon the existence of strong, miracle-working faith. This charism differed from the ordinary faith that every Christian must have for their own salvation. This is the faith the Saviour referred to when He said: “if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20). Miracle-working faith “was the unwavering confidence founded on theological faith and strengthened by a supernatural instinct that God, in this given case, would manifest His power, justice and mercy.”²⁸ This faith was also sought by the Apostles when they said, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5), and it was recommended by the Savior when He urged, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22).

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 584.

The one who possessed this charism could both heal and punish²⁹, as seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Tabitha from Joppa was raised from the dead through the faith of the Holy Apostle Peter (Acts 9:36-42). Deacon Philip performed miracles in Samaria (Acts 8:5-8) and the Holy Apostle Paul, through the power of faith, punished the sorcerer Elymas in Cyprus (Acts 12:6-12), cast out the spirit of divination in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18), and raised Eutychus in Troas (Acts 20:7-12). Faith in the protection and help promised by God (“they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all” Mark 16:18) saved St. Paul from the viper’s venom on the island of Malta (Acts 28:3-6).

All these miracles and many others, not recorded in the Holy Scripture, constitute the fulfilment of the promises (conditioned by faith)³⁰ made by the Saviour to His Holy Apostles (Mark 16:17-18).

We can even observe a certain evolution over time in the faith of the disciples. At the Last Supper, they declared: “Now we can see that You know all things and that You do not even need to have anyone ask You questions. This makes us believe that You came from God” (John 16:30). This confession did not mean “the beginning of their faith, but an unwavering strengthening through personal conviction in the faith previously received.”³¹

²⁹ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, “Comentariile la epistola I către Corintheni”, Omilia 32, trans. by Arhim. Theodosie Atanasiu, Ed. Sophia, București, 2005, p. 332.

³⁰ The Saviour did not usually ask for faith in Him before performing miracles, but only after performing them (John 9:35-38): “He rightly asked it from those who had seen or heard in others the effects of His power; but for those who did not yet know Him, and who had to know Him through miracles, He did not invite them to believe until after He had performed the miracles”; Idem, *Comentar la Evanghelia de la Ioan, Omilia 37*, Ed. *Pelerinul Român*, 1997, p. 117.

³¹ Sf. Chiril al Alexandriei, *Comentariu la Evanghelia Sf. Ioan*, 2, 11, p. 1005.

The gift of *healings*, or *cures* (1 Corinthians 12:28), was another charism frequently encountered in the apostolic Church, as effective as miracle-working faith, acting in the same realm of beneficial spiritual transformations for people. This power was endowed to the Holy Apostles, but also to many other Christians, witnesses of the Saviour's deeds and teachings³², and could be a permanent or transitory charism, offered according to God's wisdom and maintained through faith and virtues, unmistakable with miracle-working faith.³³ "The healings performed by the disciples, however, differ from those of Jesus, as they are accompanied by prayer and are done in the name of Jesus."³⁴

The Holy Apostle Peter healed a lame man at the temple entrance (Acts 3:1-11) and the paralytic Aeneas in Lydda (Acts 9:33-35). Ananias of Damascus healed Saul of blindness (Acts 9:17-18). The Holy Apostle Paul also healed a lame man in Lystra (Acts 14:8-10). He cured many people in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12), as well as the father of the proconsul Publius on the island of Malta, who was "suffering from fever and dysentery" (Acts 28:8), where many other sick people benefited from his help (Acts 28:9).

Those who had the charism of exorcism, as the Saviour commanded the disciples: "drive out demons" (Matthew 10:8), meaning they expelled unclean spirits from people, are not mentioned in the lists of charisms, as exorcism was always understood as a healing (Matthew 8:28-33). But its functionality was vital to Christian life, the best example being the events in the city of Ephesus where "handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them" (Acts 19:21). "The typical gesture of liberation - exorcism in the evangelical style"³⁵ is very

³² Pr. drd. Valeriu Drăgușin, op. cit. p. 60.

³³ Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq, op. cit., Tome 3, Part 2, 1913, p. 584.

³⁴ Dr. Constantin Preda, op. cit., p. 175.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 219.

well presented in connection with the servant girl in Philippi, who had a spirit of divination, expelled by the simple power of the word spoken in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:18).

Often, the possessed manifested violently towards those who tried to help them through prayer and power over the spirits, to expel them from the demonised person (Mark 5:3-4, Acts 19:13-16). Love and understanding of the condition of these people tormented by the devil provided all the necessary understanding to overcome these shortcomings.³⁶

7 The Church, a Sacred Space for Spiritual and Physical Healing

Saint James, the brother of the Lord and the first bishop of Jerusalem, left the following exhortation as a testament and testimony of the Church's capacity to heal its believers spiritually and physically:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven... The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:14-16).

Saint James's exhortation is in consonance with the Saviour's exhortation: “(...) they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mark 16:18), expressing the living, gracious work of transmitting the healing and saving grace from the Church's priests, eloquent in the case of Saul's healing from blindness (Acts 9:18).

³⁶ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilia la Matei*, Omilia 87, P.S.B. nr. 23, Ed. IBMBOR, București, 1994, p. 978.

Thus, the laying on of hands to heal the sick and the anointing with consecrated oil were applied in parallel, aiming to achieve the same goal: the request for divine grace for the forgiveness of sins, vital aspects in restoring the health of any person.

The Church adopted the use of oil from its religious use in Judaism, giving it higher meanings through the concrete invocation of the specific gracious work of the Holy Spirit. This oil could be blessed through the cultic action of the Church's priests, becoming holy oil, used mixed with spices or perfumes, thus called *chrism*.

The oil was to be used in the Church at baptism, primarily as a separate anointing of catechumens before baptism, then in place of the laying on of hands by the Apostles or bishops (chrismation)³⁷ following the administration of baptism. But the oil would also be used in exorcisms or healings³⁸, applied as a sacramental act of freeing the person from both personal sins and the harmful work of the devil.

³⁷ In the 3rd century AD, the Christian apologist Tertullian said: "after the saving bath <Baptism> we are anointed with a holy anointing, for it is necessary that the one who has been baptised receive this anointing" -- Tertullian, *De baptismo*, VII, apud. Dom Cabrol, *La priere des premiers chretiens*, Editura Bernard Grosset, Paris 1929, p. 165.

³⁸ "The Apostolic Tradition" of Saint Hippolytus (Chapter X), speaking about the ritual of laying on of hands, made a distinction between the oil of exorcism, or the oil of catechumens, and the mystical oil, or the oil of the action of grace, the holy oil, the oil of perfection, the oil of confirmation (chrismation), always applied only after baptism. This distinction is preserved to this day both among Roman Catholics - Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq, op. cit. p. 2782, - and among Orthodox.

8 Conclusions

Although contemporary man is subject to sin and existential disorientation, seemingly more extensively than ever, the recourse to God and the benefits of salvation remain valid through the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit and the continuously present and intercessory Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. He redeemed us from sin through His death on the cross, and this proof of His unconditional love continues to offer us the great opportunity for salvation, redemption, and perfection. Man has the conditions for his own spiritual transformation within his power, should he still desire to transcend the reductive limits of earthly life. The spiritual healing of diseases and the overcoming of death are just as valid as at the moment of the revealed initiation of the salvific and redemptive teachings of Christianity.