

# SICKNESS AND HEALING: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The key message in this holistic approach is that man is a complex being and mind, body and spirit interact with our health. Thus, illness is a disorder that needs to be treated interdisciplinary. Theology and science must collaborate as a symphony in order to restore human life physically and spiritually. In Christian anthropology the state of human normality is perceived in the unity of soul and body manifestations. Thus any disease has, first of all, a spiritual cause and then a medical or psychological one. The Christian perspective of the disease does not annul the scientific approach but complements it, enriches it and perfect it.*

**Keywords:** illness, healing, clinical psychology, allopathic medicine, spiritual enlightenment

## Introduction

A contemporary human attitude in the face of sickness and suffering must aim at an interdisciplinary approach encompassing all aspects: spiritual, psychological and clinical. Disease seen holistically has profound connotations of the dichotomous structure of man (body and soul) and thus, healing them involves an intertwining of theological and scientific methods.

Disease must be regarded as divine pedagogy to investigate us. Life is a time of reflection, a time of repentance. If God allows suffering is for our good because: „As I live, say the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways” (Ezekiel 33, 11). Suffering is a way of salvation and transfiguration,

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which is effective for anyone who accepts it with humility and faith in God's mercy.

In Christian anthropology the natural human condition is seen in unity of the soul and body, which is fulfilled when the soul which seeks God governs the body. The soul is the human capacity to distinguish supreme values: right from wrong, truth from lie, beauty from ugliness. Thus, any sickness has both a spiritual cause, and a psychosomatic one. The Christian perspective of sickness does not invalidate the scientific approach but completes, enriches and perfects it.

Hippocrates, the father of medicine, believed that the human being can be understood only if it is viewed holistically. Later, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Paracelsus will tell us that the human body, health and disease are based on the harmony between man (the microcosms) and nature (macrocosms), so the macrocosmic universe was said to be present in each microcosm of a person. Currently doctors focus more on setting a diagnosis and give treatment for a particular disease, often forgetting to look at human person in its totality. According to Lars Thunberg who researched Saint Maximus the Confessor's vision of man and cosmos, the human being is seen as an integral part of the macro-cosmos. Man is a reflection of the Trinity and his constitution is likened to the triad, „which is strictly anthropological in character: *Being - Well-Being - Ever-being*. It is related to the classical distinction in some of the earlier Fathers between image and likeness (Genesis 1,26) in the sense that *Being* and *Ever-being* refer to the image of the God in man, while *Well-being* (which is included also in *Ever-being* in the blessed and perfect state of man) refers to the likeness of God in man”<sup>2</sup>.

In this seminar research I try to present some issue of the disease and its treatment that needs to be regarded from multidisciplinary aspects. The work is divided into four themes: the first two chapters present the meaning of illness from the psychosomatic and theological perspective and the last two chapters talk about healing from an interdisciplinary point of view.

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<sup>2</sup> Lars Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos - The Vision of St. Maximus Confessor*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1985, p. 46.

## 1. Sickness - a psychosomatic disorder

Humber and Almeder define sickness as an „internal state which is either an impairment of normal function ability, i.e. a reduction of one or more functional abilities below typical efficiency, or a limitation on functional ability caused by environmental agents”<sup>3</sup>. Disease is a holistic state of an organism involving internal disharmony or a dysfunctional mode of interaction with the biological and living environment. As a result, there is a physiological (an invasion by a disease entity) and a psychological (an upsetting of internal balances) side to any illness. „Writers have also disagreed on the classification criteria for the disease, asking whether it should be based on symptoms or causes, and whether the concept should embrace injuries and wounds, as well as other pathological condition”<sup>4</sup>.

Our attitude towards sickness must become less functional and more personal. The patient should be seen as a person and not just as any individual. Sick people can have similar symptoms but have different causes, so illness should be viewed and treated differently depending on its cause. Disease and pain are much more than a simply sensory experience, they are a multi-dimensional phenomenon. They manifest on the physical, emotional, and rational levels, and they influence our life in many different ways. This idea is reflected, for example, in Fernando Cervero’s book, *Understanding Pain*: „The experience of pain depends more on the background of a specific situation than on the magnitude of an underlying injury”<sup>5</sup>.

Disease treatment should be considered a fundamental human right and health authorities should implement measures to reduce pain and suffering. With the discovery of anaesthesia and anti-septics, then antibiotics, physicians are able to offer patients a reasonable chance for effective treatment of the causes of disease. What this is obviously a good thing, an unwanted side effect is that it has removed the theological reflection on purpose of life

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<sup>3</sup>James M. Humber and Robert F. Almeder – *What is disease?*, 1997, Humana Press, U.S.A., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> Fernando Cervero, *Understanding Pain*, 2012, Cambridge, UK, p. 163.

and death from the equation. „One effect of this scientific development in medicine has been to move death out of the home. Death has become physically removed from the context of everyday life, thereby assisting a common psychological tendency to avoid thought of death.”<sup>6</sup>

I believe that the relationship between patient and physician is one of the most important topics in relation to dealing with sickness in a holistic way. This becomes an acutely clear especially in the terminal phases of disease. It is not always easy to distinguish between whether the best decision is that somebody should undergo complex and sometimes painful treatment, or allow them the chance to die with dignity, and to use the time for reflection on the meaning and finitude of life. You have to distinguish between the moral approach, pastoral approach to the problem and the legal one. For example, euthanasia may be legal but not the morals. „We have to ask ourselves whether medicine is to remain a humanitarian and respected profession or a new but depersonalized science in the service of prolonging life rather than diminishing human suffering.”<sup>7</sup> Using the words of Saint Paul, we can say that the doctor is put in a position to ascertain „all things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful” (I Corinthians 6, 12).

Physicians must learn the value of science and technology simultaneously with the art and science of inter-human relationships, of human and total patient-care. As Kubler-Ross says: „If science and technology are not to be misused to increase destructiveness, prolonging life rather than making it more human, if they could go hand in hand with freeing more time rather than less for individual person-to-person contacts, then we could really speak of a great society”<sup>8</sup>.

Sickness can be the result of a psychological disturbance that causes a somatic (organic) disorder, i.e. psychosomatic illness. Psychosomatic illnesses can affect any or all parts of the body:

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<sup>6</sup> Michael D. Bayles and Dallas M. High – *Medical treatment of the dying: moral issues*, 1983, Cambridge, UK, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross – *On death and dying*, 2001, St. Edmundsbury Press, London, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

the digestive system (ulcer, colitis), the endocrine system (hyperthyroidism, diabetes), genitor-urinary (impotence, enuresis), cardiovascular (heart attack of myocardium), respiratory (asthma, pulmonary tuberculosis), skin (eczema), etc. The treatment of psychosomatic illnesses has a physical stage which needs to be complemented further by psychotherapy.

When somebody learns that they have a disease, this triggers great emotional stress, which according to Kubler-Ross's classic book *On death and dying*, has several stages: Denial and Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance and Hope. Thus disease must be investigated from an interdisciplinary point of view: psychological and pathological.

Holistic medicine is an ancient concept which is explored nowadays by mainstream, allopathic medicine, which increasingly acknowledges a psychosomatic approach to healing. At its base lies the idea of a permanent connection between body, mind and soul. Between these three levels there are many mechanisms of complex interdependence. It was already proven that prolonged states of stress, anxiety or fear may prevent the proper functioning of some organs or systems in the human body. However, we need to realize that it is not only negative states maintained in the long term can affect our health, but also our thoughts, our words and daily emotions.

It seems to me that a common idea of great scholars or people who pondered the meaning of life and our journey thought it, is that the power of one's thoughts is the main form of manifesting in the world and this mirrors the creation of the world by the Logos-Reason of God. Or like a wise saying: „tell me what you think, to tell you who you are”. In this light, diseases are a sign from our physical body, which should be interpreted not just physiologically, but also in the sense that we made a specific mistake on the level of thinking, feeling or communication with others. Thus, the moment you realize the mistake made, or the real cause behind the said disease, this can have a positive impact of the healing process.

If, however, we don't use psychotherapeutic methods, meaning healing through positive thinking (or noesitherapy, as it is called) in addition to traditional allopathic treatments, then we have all

the chances to not learn from that experience. That's why we go through the same health problems sooner or later; until we learn that, on a certain level, everything eventually starts from ourselves – sickness or wellbeing.

For example in 2015, a medical research was published in the American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine about „*Spiritual Experiences of Transcendence in Patients with Advanced Cancer*”. It is a report on methods of miraculous healing in cases of incurable diseases. A total of 251 patients with advanced cancer were included and observed over 12 months by a psycho-oncologist. Study results showed that „135 patients communicated a spiritual experience during hospitalisation, as expressed by altered body – awareness, less pain, less anxiety, higher acceptance of illness/death, new spiritual identity”<sup>9</sup>. These conclusions indicate that experience-based spiritual care can successfully complement basic clinical treatment. The results of the study highlight the fact that through a total mobilization, seriously ill patients were able to overcome their condition of sickness. The main factors that challenged the imminence of death and helped prolong life and improve the quality of it, were: -the growing belief in the power of their own healing, in the ability of physicians and treatments, in the openness of mind for spiritual healing through prayer, an awareness of their mistakes or sins and by the desire to change their life completely.

A new branch of neuroscience, neurotheology, that emerged in the last decade is a discipline that studies the relationship between religious phenomena and the biology of the brain. Enhanced by the spectacular advances in the multidisciplinary scientific nanotechnologies, biology, computer science, cognitive science (NBIC), neurotheology addresses an important philosophical problem concerning free will. Research into the links between genetics, faith and the brain is just getting started. The subject is very sensitive: naturally, for a faithful person it is not easy to imagine, or to accept that their faith is dictated by their brain biology and

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<sup>9</sup> M. Renz, PhD, *Spiritual Experiences of Transcendence in Patients With Advanced Cancer*, American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine, 2015, Vol. 32 (2), pp. 178-188.

their DNA, and is not the fruit of a meeting with spiritual transcendence. The link between genetic heritage, human brain activity and faith is a scientific challenge that offers ample scope for further research.

## 2. Disease – a way of *askesis*

A fascinating perspective on the spiritual dimension of suffering belongs to Nicolai Berdyaev in *Spirit and Reality*: „suffering is not an evil but the result of evil”. Berdyaev continues: „the paradox of suffering and evil is resolved in the experience of compassion and love”. He talks of expiation as „the peculiar virtue of the suffering of love”<sup>10</sup>. This is a tremendously insightful vision and I also agree with Iulia de Beausobre who says that „Christian spirituality should acknowledge the absolute worth of every personality and should be sensitive to the painful destiny of every man”<sup>11</sup>.

Human life and the world are sometimes regarded as a „valley of Baca” (valley of weeping) (Psalm 84, 6); the world in general and the man in particular are the embodiment of suffering. This suffering is a consequence of the nostalgia of the lost paradise; of the removal of the Adamic condition, that is felt at the level of the ontological being and which cannot be experienced empirically. Etymologically, the word *nostalgia* means „return with pain” (*nostos* = „return home”, *algos* = „pain”) to a state of existence which cannot be relived. This pain is felt by Man who fell into sin and it leads to a continuous search for the sense of life. Contemporary man no longer finds a spiritual explanation for suffering, no longer gives it sense, and endeavours to avoid it as something absurd.

In the absence of religion or faith, there is no redeeming quality for suffering because without this system of reference, suffering is regarded as an absurd thing and makes existence itself seem absurd. If ours would only be a natural/biological existence, suffering would then be a crude, permanent and mechanical law, and its ubiquity in this world would then make it tantamount to

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<sup>10</sup> N. Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality* apud Iulia de Beausobre, *Creative Suffering*, Glasgow, 1954, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Iulia de Beausobre, *Creative Suffering*, Glasgow, 1954, p. 25.

the essence of the world. But negativity or evil cannot constitute itself the sense of life or human existence. Indeed, only faith can give an explanation, because it argues that suffering doesn't constitute being in itself but, moreover, that it is an accident in creation.

Suffering must be regarded as God's care and as a sign that He has not left the fallen into sin. Sinful man should understand disease as a way of *askesis*, thanking God as a good parent who takes care of him: „for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3, 12) and as St. Paul explains: „for the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12, 6). By accepting disease and suffering, sinful man puts all his hope in God, who is the main Doctor of souls and bodies: „The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23, 1).

The tests given to us by the good and merciful God are sometimes meant to humble us. Disease or suffering brings us closer to God, to prayer, to a spiritual condition of our own ontological nature created in the image and likeness of God. In this way Saint Paul inspires us: „a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated” (II Corinthians 12, 7).

To understand why God permits our sufferings, Saint Maximus the Confessor in *Ambigua* shows us that there are three reasons: „- by changing the body in the evil state we are punished for our sins; -by this change we repair our weaknesses and stay away from mistakes to come; -by bearing some tribulations, that man is given to others as a parable of patience”<sup>12</sup>. In these ways the body is spiritually fortified, has no passions, reaching a state of spiritual rising that leads to salvation. Therefore, suffering is not a goal in itself but a means by which man is called upon to return to God.

When we speak of sickness and suffering we still need to look at life as a gift given to us by the good Lord. Job in his distress had power and faith to say „The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1, 21). In sickness,

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<sup>12</sup> Sf. Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Ambigua*, Editura Basilica, Bucuresti, 2006, pp. 152-153.

in shame and persecution he remains faithful and resists the temptation to rise against God, to which the devil lures him through the mouth of his wife: „Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2, 9). In these moments, Job stands in anticipation and openness towards God’s will, who wants to save him.

The miracles of God offered to us appear in a different light in moments of distress and are felt by us as a relief and an encouragement in our patience before troubles. But for our suffering, we wouldn’t feel these wonders in every moment of our lives because we would only pay attention to what we understand, to the things or facts that suit us and satisfy our immediate pleasures and needs. We are open through suffering and our spiritual eyes thus begin to understand, to live and to contemplate the mysteries of God, which represent the fountain of faith and hope.

Human being rising from sin cannot be complete without the help of God and of Christ, the utmost archetype of suffering which He assumed. Christ is the Doctor of our souls and bodies, He restored the sick or feeble people, he restored their health and even He has given the liberation from corruption and death. From a Christian perspective we should understand that in the sick it is Christ, who suffers, and through the physician it is Christ who works, and the priest is the messenger of Christ.

The miracles of Christ are signs which he gives to us about our future restoration, when man will be in his body permanently cured of any sickness and he will be in a perfect and imperishable health. Those who follow Christ will be rehabilitated in the Kingdom of heaven with all the dead resurrection and their bodies shall arise from depravity and will be transfigured: „So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable” (I Corinthians 15, 42).

Christ, showing God’s love for man, comes to save him in his entirety, soul and body, not only in this life but also after his death, when his body will become incorruptible, to fully enjoy God’s goodness through his whole human being. By the victory of Christ over death, death ceases to be an end to man, and above all, for his body, a definitive separation of the soul. The body after death will experience a new condition, perfect health, total and

definitive, so that he may receive in the flesh as well as in his soul the fullness of grace, to do with his whole being, part of the divine nature: „His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1, 3-4).

Union with Christ is in following Christ and self-denial. Through this self-denial man can be reached at shunning of passions, and through a virtuous life he ultimately reaches a spiritual union with God, which is called *deification*. About this *deification*, Father Staniloae tells us that: „it means an awakening and an amplification of the spiritual powers that lie asleep in the flesh because of sin, under the seal of an evil spell. We cannot know up to which level the forces of human nature can increase. The huge intellectual and spiritual human variations from person to person indicate that human nature is not trapped within rigid limits, but has great elasticity. We cannot know however how high its threshold can be lifted. On the other hand, this increase is not only a development inside out, but is also additional power from the outside, from God”<sup>13</sup>.

Our Saviour, Jesus Christ, teaches that to have a perfect life according to the spirit of his Gospel we have to experience trials and suffering during our earthly lives, but by patience and hope we shall find rest in the eternal Kingdom of God: „In the world you have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16, 33). Once this understanding of earthly life is reached, sickness and suffering are not only bearable but also sometimes useful. So we ask the question of whether sickness is a gift or a punishment from God, a friend or an enemy.

The ascetic tradition teaches that suffering should not be removed because it is a resource for spiritual renewal and revitalisation. The lack of testing in our lives is regarded as a removal of God, as the withdrawal of divine Providence. As the iron hardens

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<sup>13</sup> Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului*, Editura Basilica, Bucharest, 2015, p. 233.

in fire so man must purify himself through trial and suffering, then stand up stronger and more grateful to God. Through sickness we see human frailty and hopelessness of this life and feel more need to be helped by God and those around us. As no one can heal his own body, so no one can reach spiritual salvation alone, outside the community with God and with his neighbours. Man was created not to be alone on Earth (Genesis 2, 18) and that is why the love of the Holy Trinity must be reflected also in the love between people when they experience joy but mostly when they experience trouble. Through illness we join with our fellows and we are mystically united with God.

### **3. Healing diseases**

We start here from the reality that health and sickness are both states of the body and of the soul and healing them must be linked to the two states. For a good healing must we must find a cause or reason, so that disease may be viewed holistically as a dysfunction of the mind which generates a bodily pain or suffering. Thus the priest, psychologist and doctor need to work together to restore full health in the suffering person.

The priest, by the grace which he has received, has the Sacraments and spiritual means for the healing and salvation of the faithful. All the Sacraments extend the grace of God to the human being, which heal soul wounds caused by sins, but the Sacrament of Holy Unction, united with the Sacrament of Confession and the Sacrament of Communion offers treatment in order to fully restore its integrity, body and soul. These three Sacraments which help man to purify sin and to heal, give a meaning to suffering, cast away fear of death and imparts the knowledge of God to people, which is the true life –the „eternal life” (John. 17, 3).

The work of the Holy Sacrament has a fully use when is accompanied with other means of healing of soul and body. The fast held by the sick after a standing established by the Confessor, private prayer of patient or those close to him, the intercession of Saints, veneration of sacred Relics and Sacred icons, other good deeds and charity complete the work of Sacraments for the man who is in suffering. Unceasing and persevering prayer, recommended

by Christ: „will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night” (Luke 18, 7), countless gifts sick faithful intercedes. Prayer is mind speaking with God and the man who endures the trouble with understanding will make to find fruit in time of prayer and finally will receive the crown of martyrdom. The sign of the cross is another traditional means of healing. Apart from the fact that he calls and puts in the work of the Trinity energy, it is also a strong sign of Christ's victory over death and corruption, over sin and the devil, and, therefore, over the sickness which is linked to these. Therapeutic power of the cross is referred to in the service of Raising of the Holy Cross, when it is called multiple times „doctor patients”.

By all pastoral activity the priest must help the people understand the spiritual meaning of life and why is there suffering in this world. Fr. Staniloae says that the ‘cross’ of suffering means a sacrifice, an effort to bring man towards God, his Creator: „The world is a gift of God, but the destiny of this gift is to unite man with God who has given it. The intention of the gift is that in itself it should be continually transcendent. When we receive a gift from somebody we should look primarily towards the person who has given it and not keep our eye fixed on the gift. God demands an unconditional love from us for he is infinitely greater than any of the gifts which he gives us. In this way every gift requires a certain cross, and this cross is meant to show us that all the gifts are not the last and final reality. This cross consists in an alteration in the gift, and sometimes even in its entire loss”<sup>14</sup>.

Along with these spiritual means, for the healing of the sick person are administered therapies of allopathic medicine, as advises Jesus Syrah: „honour the physician with the honour due him, according to your need of him, for the Lord created him; for healing comes from the Most High” (Syrah 38,1-2). God gave people the science of medicine and pharmacy in order to heal the sick, to remove the pain and to give us a healthy life. When someone is ill he must consult the doctor because: „who sins before his Maker, may he fall into care of a physician” (Syrah 38, 15).

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<sup>14</sup>Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *The Victory of Cross*, Oxford, 1970, p. 1.

At the beginning of Christianity medicine was a social institution and subsequently it developed in the midst of ecclesial communities in the form of infirmaries or sick wards. Orthodox monasteries included hospitals in their structures, which were financed, administered, and were served mostly by the monastic community with the exception of the professional medical staff. Nevertheless the ultimate healer is God, and that ultimate hope is not to be placed in the physician or his science, but in spiritual truth and realities. „This was embodied in parallel panoply of healing practices medical through the spiritual life of the Church, including prayer, sacraments, and healing saints”<sup>15</sup>.

Starting from the concept that the priest, doctor and psychologist treats but God heals through his son Jesus Christ, „the Doctor of our souls and bodies”, man must realize that all that happen in his life are related by a divine providence, „who desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2, 4).

Nowadays in the psychotherapeutic treatment there are two realities that start from different premises: *Orthodox psychotherapy* that is turned to God and Victor Franklin *logotherapy* (psychotherapy in terms of mind), which is directed by man. Orthodox psychotherapy aims to end the achieving of a continuous relationship with God. By restoring the health of mind and bodily man rebuilds paradise status and is shifting toward the receiving divine sight, towards *deification*. In Logotherapy/Existential Analysis (LTEA) the search for a meaning in life is identified as the primary motivational force in human beings. Frankl's approach is based on three philosophical and psychological concepts: *Freedom of Will*, *Will to Meaning*, and *Meaning in Life*. He says: „the goal of psychotherapy is o heal the soul, to make it healthy; the aim of religion is something essentially different – to save the soul”<sup>16</sup>. Theology offers the greatest sense of the man that is deification, communion and Union with God. From this perspective, we see great value and significance of the desert tradition (*hesychasm*), the so-called Orthodox contemporary psychotherapies.

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<sup>15</sup> Stanley S. Harakas, *Wholeness of Faith and Life: Orthodox Christian Ethics*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Massachusetts, SUA, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, M.D., Phd, *The concept of man in psychotherapy*, Pastoral Psychology, 11/1955, Vol. 6, p. 20, from Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine, London, June 1954, p. 20.

### Healing versus illumination

Our biological life is described as a dynamic non-linear system depending on metabolism, the continuous import, processing, and export of matter and energy. „Metabolism means ‘catabolic’ metabolism, i.e., the acquisition of energy by decomposing energy-rich matter, and on the other hand, ‘anabolic’ metabolism, i.e., the construction of components of cells such as a protein and nucleic acids need for repair and growth.”<sup>17</sup>

The sunlight is the main energy supplier for most organisms. Plants use sunlight energy for the oxidation of water molecules in the process called phototropism, which means „nutrition using light”. Firstly, sunlight represents a virtually unlimited energy source, and secondly, in the process of photosynthesis, which is the heart of phototropism, carbon dioxide and hydrogen are converted into glucose (sugar), while oxygen is realised as a „waste product”. Oxygen then, together with nitrogen, becomes the major component of our atmosphere, and plants, and animals, including humans, cannot live without this atmosphere. So we can say that from a biological point of view light was the primary factor of the appearance of life on Earth: „Let be the light” (Genesis 1, 3). When we are sick, but also when we are in a period of fasting we eat vegetable products to restore and to purify the health and to illumine our body.

The word „light” is „lumen” in Latin and it also means „world”, „life” and „jewel”. The whole world was contained in the virtual physical light from the beginning of Creation. It is created out of nothing, and by the Christ - the Word, the Light of the World, and the Life of the World: „in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the light was the light of men” (John 1, 1-5).

At the end of the 17th century two physicists, Newton and Huygens, showed the light properties of corpuscle and wave. It is at the same time matter and wave-energy that propagate in

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<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Roth, *The Long Evolution of the Brains and Mind*, Springer Press, London, 2013, p. 44.

time and space. Any matter in our universe is a whole matrix of energy. Therefore, the universe is a network of energy links that are in close contact with each other. The human being is both matter and energy and is also in a relationship with the universe energy. Energy deregulation within the human being and also between people can cause physical and mental illness. Father teaches us that when there will be no communion (energy inter-connection) between people world will end. The physical world, which is created by God and is made of matter and energy, must be a continuous exchange of energy because without it could not exist. Human life and health depend on these energies that can be positive or negative and can influence human behaviour and can cause illness and ultimately death.

Human thoughts are an energy source that are transmitted on a specific frequency from one person to another and which rises later in words or in various behaviours. Thus the power or energy of our thoughts and words can generate positive or negative vibration. When reason or mind is united with prayer, as in the hesychast practice of the „Jesus Prayer”, this generates thoughts and words with a positive energy that can heal and regenerate human body.

Einstein's theory of relativity says that the speed of light in vacuum is the highest speed possible in nature, being considered a universal constant absolute. When a particle approaches the speed of light then times dilates and contract lengths. Vacuum from a spiritual point of view represents the state in which the human mind admires divine miracles and is no longer able to think something rational. This condition is called in Desert tradition „*hesychia*, the quality of stillness or silence”<sup>18</sup>. By doing this we tend to contemplate, we come closer to the divine light and so earthly time becomes relative when we are in the proximity of God: „for a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past” (Psalm 90, 4). Therefore, just as in the case of Einstein's theory, the closer we get to God's light, the more the time of our lives is dilated.

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<sup>18</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1985, p. 89.

The bodily and spiritual health that he received it from the creation of Adam, who „it was very good” (Genesis 1, 31), must be rebuilt by man through collaboration of the human will with the help of the Holy Spirit. Free will consented to man, which is the focus of the mind toward removal of passions and the practice of virtue is helped by prayer to be able to receive the divine light of the uncreated energies. Human reason is purified during prayer and can radiate the light of Holy Trinity. „But the intellect which is worthy of that light transmits to the body which is united to it many beautiful signs of divinity, mediating between divine grace and fleshy imperviousness granting power to that which is of itself powerless.”<sup>19</sup>

The final and total healing of man represents a return to God because he is „the fountain of life” (Psalm 36, 9), our „light” and „salvation” (Psalm 27, 1). This return represents a revival of paradisiacal state, when the man was in the divine light, being removed from sin. If our eyes, which are the mirror of soul, are no longer focus towards sins then the body will not sin, as Jesus say: „The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6, 22). So, healing means a shunning of passions and enlightenment through God's uncreated energies. When we get to feel the divine light, we will return the sons of light: „while you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12.36). It involves lighting a gracious state that energy peaks when all our bodies will be raised at the Second Coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Then the human being will transform and: „the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15, 53).

## Conclusions

The idea that health is in close connection with the mind, spirit and environment is centuries-old. However, with the development

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<sup>19</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, Light and Life Publishing Company, Minnesota, SUA, 1995, p. 93.

of science and of Newtonian physics, it has produced guidance towards a model in which the body was seen as a machine which could be fixed if it breaks, or as a combination of chemical processes that could be controlled artificially with drugs produced by humans.

The key message of this holistic approach is that, far from being some machines, we are complex beings and that the mind, body and spirit, interact and deeply affect our health and well-being. For example, the way in which we feed we influence not only physical health but also your IQ and mental state. Psychological exercise can change the disposition, while calming the mind through prayer, has a profound effect on the heart, the respiratory and immune function. It was also demonstrated that prayer change the brain wave pattern: beta waves (13-30 Hz) that indicate high stress levels are replaced by the waves Alpha (8-12 Hz), that indicates a state of relaxation and calm.

That's why disease should be regarded as a psychosomatic affection, which needs to be treated interdisciplinary, but it must also be understood from the point of view of a spiritual suffering. Theology and science must join forces to save the human person from spiritual, mental and physical decay. These branches must collaborate as in a symphony in order to restore physical and spiritual meaning of human life.

Stăniloae believes that the meaning of suffering is closely related to knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is achieved through a cataphatic (affirmative) and apophatic (negative) experience and through all real life circumstances. „The combination of these three kinds of knowledge can be seen in the case of Job or in a host of places in the Psalms. To Job, who wishes to understand why God has sent him his suffering, God displays his wonders of nature so that Job might accept the mystery of his acts which transcend all understanding. The Psalmist too, knowing from many circumstances in his life the presence of God which transcends understanding, praises him at the same time for the greatness of his acts in nature.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Pr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *The experience of God*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Massachusetts, SUA, 1998, p. 122.

Sickness must be regarded as a concern of God for man, and we experience the words given by Christ: „you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself” (Luke 10, 27). Through suffering we must find the way to get closer to God’s Love and to our neighbour who needs love and help the Cartesian coordinates of our lives – the vertical axis, which represents our relationship with God and the horizontal axis, which is the concern for our neighbours.