



Perspectives on human dignity and on existential and religious needs of patients with advanced illnesses

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Outline of the presentation

- To highlight the human being's value in its entirety
- To present existential and religious needs of patients
- To discuss the ministry of the priest in the hospice
- To stress upon the distinction between *curing* and *healing*

Deification (theosis) of the human being in Christ

- is „a central point of theology, ascetics and mystics of the Orthodox Church”
- teaching derived from the Holy Scripture and from the apostolic and patristic writings.
 - Saint John's teaching about adoption (Jn.1:12) and likeness to God (1Jn.3:2), and in *2Peter* 1,4 - „partakers of the divine nature”

Patristic references

- Saint Ignatius calls the Christians *theophoroi* (bearers of God), speaking of union with God and their participation in Him.
- Saint Irenaeus - the concept of „recapitulation”, Christ assumed all of us like a new Adam, he is our Head and He „became what we are, for us to become what He is” *Efes.9.2* [66]
- Saint Athanasius the Great: „He humanized Himself for us so that we can be deified”

I. Considerations regarding the value of the human body

- “Culture is now as much body-oriented as it was spiritually oriented in the past, and its interest in everything concerning human body borders on obsession”

Sergey Horujy http://synergia-isa.ru/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/hor_leban_talk.pdf

- Stressing the importance of the human body as “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1Co.6:19) can profoundly impact the perspectives on palliative care

Contrast between the value of the human body as an integral part of the human being and the value of the different components

- The human body contains approximately: 65% Oxygen, 18% Carbon, 10% Hydrogen, 3% Nitrogen, 1.5% Calcium, 1% Phosphorous, 0.35% Potassium, 0.25% Sulphur, 0.15% Sodium, 0.15% Chlorine, 0.05% Magnesium, 0.0004% Iron, 0.00004% Iodine and traces of other elements (Silicon, Manganese, Fluorine, Copper, Zinc, Arsenic and Aluminium.)
- The going rate for a body's worth of these elements is about **one US dollar!!!** The skin would be worth about \$3.50 A dollar's worth of elements plus the value of the skin would round **up to \$5."**

(<http://chemistry.about.com/b/2011/02/06/how-much-are-the-elements-in-your-body-worth.htm>)

2. The human being - an unitary structure

Old Testament:

- “My soul is hungry” (Ps.107:9), “My soul is thirsty” (Prov.25:25)
- *Nephesh* and *basar* are not two distinctive things, two different essences, as *psyche* and *soma* for Plato, but two words standing for the human being from the point of view of his psychosomatomical organization

The body is a concrete manifestation of the soul, as its *phenomenon*; this makes the body able to express a certain ‘visibility’, a certain concreteness of the soul. This strict interdependence between the body and the soul points to an absolutely positive vision of the human body.

For example, certain parts of the body correspond to some faculties of the soul: the heart must be considered an embodied equivalent for the soul, the kidneys, organs traditionally associated with the heart, refer to the faculty of the secret thoughts, the intimate being of man; the liver stands for the elementary feelings

Romanian language provides a holistic perspective on human being

- In order to reflect the psycho-somatic reality Romanian terms are
- *Trup- Body* (although in Slavonic means *corpse!*) inside of which the heart (*inima* - from the Latin word *anima*) beats. The word *trup* corresponds to the Jewish *basar*, expressing *corpus* and *anima* at the same time.
- *Suflet* - Soul comes from the Latin verb *sufflare* (to blow), which suggests movement, life and makes a close connection to the body, the source of blowing.

3. The human body: 'translucent organ of God's infinite mystery'

- Father Stăniloae states that: “the human body is a palpable, concrete, special rationality, in connection with the palpable, concrete rationality of nature.
- “But Christ, becoming man made up of soul and body, showed us the value God is granting to the human body, also called by resurrection to eternity”
- ”In the human body assumed by the Son of God there is to be found the ground and the spring of sanctification of the whole material cosmos and out of Him we ourselves receive power in order to collaborate, through our very body, to the sanctification of the cosmos”

Death defeated by Christ's death

- The Son of God makes use even of the death in order to defeat it. He overturns the sense of death and it is used by Him as means of defeating it and of entering as man in the eternal life. God offers this way in His incarnated Son a positive sense even to the death”.
- „The resurrected bodies remain unchanged from the point of view of their being, but they are to be transfigured by the Holy Spirit. However, Christianity believes in an eternity of the the matter, transfigured by the power and infinite richness of the spiritual life and by the divine energies. Christianity admits a kind of *mystical materialism* and speaks about a *holy matter*, since holy is God’s body by whose reception our bodies receive holiness”

The terminally ill patient's struggles

four groups among of hospice patients:

1. those who do not know they have cancer;
2. those who know (or are almost certain) and refuse to admit it to themselves and others;
3. those who admit they are terminally ill and who experience all their fears and the helplessness of isolation;
4. those who are fully aware of their condition they accept it as a reality and go through the process of adjustment.

Discovering faith while confronting death: „I believe in one God”

- The act of faith involves the person at its deepest level.
 - joys, fears, uncertainties, etc
 - all contribute to a personal and genuine act of faith
- Between believe *that* and believe *in* there is a fundamental distinction. When I tell a close friend: „I believe in you” means more than expressing belief that this person exists. „I believe in you” means: „You are my support”, „I trust you”.

Faith may coexist with doubt

"Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief" (Mk. 9:24).

- for many of us this will remain the main prayer until the time of separation from this world.
- doubt does not mean lack of faith. It can mean just the opposite - that our faith grows and is alive.
- faith does not mean complacency and self-gratification, but risk taking, not closing itself, but the confrontation with the unknown.

“The dying patient is a living person”

- Disease and crises in general can contribute to a deeper experience of faith
- The persons with incurable disease can be found in a turning point:
 - they may have a chance to find God for the first time,
 - They experience an increased ability to develop a pre-existing relationship with Him.
- The reality of God comes to the forefront of the mind and attention of the terminally ill.

Priest attitude

- to be free of prejudices when you meet a person whose death is imminent.
 - *The terminally ill can identify with our weaknesses and our limitations. But they cannot identify with attitudes that express routine and repetition rather than the originality of a personal encounter.*
- open and honest company
- to remain involved in the relationship, while he admits his helplessness in understanding the mysteries.
- form relationships with other team members. A hospice is essentially a collective service in which all share the care of the patient.
- declare his own imperfection = unifying force in relationship.
- The priest must be able to show that God is great enough to not only accept our mistakes, but our allegations as well.

Role of the priest

- *“to put aside half-truths, superstitions and unfinished conclusions about God”*
- to lead the patient to an image of God as personal and caring “What reason cannot grasp from a mystery, love can”
- put things in perspective of a healthy relationship with God; relationship in which God remains God and what is human remains human.

Strength in weakness

- *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Co.12: 9-10).*

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- Thanks to the discovery of a personal God, faith can give the terminal patient: light, peace, relaxation, trust, and meaning

Priest offering sacramental therapy

- *through him the patient receives spiritual therapy, sanctifying grace, that is the work of the Spirit of Christ in the Church through the*
 - *Sacrament of Confession*
 - the patient is called to share her/his faith and to recall the principles of Christian life and then confess with deep regret her/his sins. The penitent then receives absolution from the priest with a canon that should not be considered punishment, but medicine and therapy. By Confession, the patient receives forgiveness, which can not given by any human therapy
 - *Holy Anointment*
 - the patient receives comforting and healing grace and absolution of evil committed, which she/he is no longer aware of
 - provides a deep sense of solidarity patient, family, neighbors, team, due to Bible readings, prayers and anointing itself
 - *Holy Eucharist(Communion).*
 - the patient is mystically united with the crucified and resurrected Christ, and if she/he had sincere repentance and determination to avoid any possible wrongdoing, the sins are erased:
 - the faithful shares in the sufferings and expiatory sacrifice of the Savior, and foretastes the eternal joy together with the risen and ascended Christ.

Distinction between curing and healing

- **curing** refers to the physiological reconstruction of the physical body,
- **healing** has many meanings inner peace, forgiveness, rehabilitation, resulting in removing the stigma imposed on the patient by a culture in which the disease is exclusively associated with sin;
- theological perspective: healing is salvation (soteria)
- healing means also eliminating social barriers, for instance in the case of the man with leprosy, told in the Gospel of Saint Mark (1:40-45), who asks Jesus to cleanse him, asks Him implicitly to reintegrate him in his community.
- The good news of the Gospel from this perspective is that it creates inclusive communities and condemns oppressive and dehumanizing systems and structures.

How can the Church, hierarchy and the faithful, together with all other factors, be a meaningful presence for those who suffer and interact effectively with health care?

- hospices build and run by the Church

BUCURESTI



CLUJ NAPOCA



