

## THE ANCIENT CHURCH AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

*The writings of the Holy Fathers reveal a variety of attitudes towards medicine, ranging from acknowledging it and displaying extreme trust in doctors' prescriptions to reasons for distrust; however, there is almost always a Christian concern to legitimize medicine as a useful tool for healing, but at the same time to consider it a gift of God who instituted it. Numerous testimonies also convey the metaphor of Christ "medicus", variously described and circulated in both East and West. The combination of Christian care and professional medicine gave rise to the first hospitals, also inspired by the Christian hospitality and philanthropy available in various establishments in both East and West. The new structures were established as centres of treatment and effectively assumed a monopoly on universal medical practice.*

**Keywords:** Christ; doctor; hospice; hospital; care; philanthropy;

### INTRODUCTION

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (In 15,12). Such words, spoken by the Saviour Jesus Christ shortly before his Passion, have remained central in the Church's consciousness for the foundation of its mission in the world. And we can safely say that in every age the Church has shown great care in responding to this Gospel command, adapting at every moment to the many changes of history and to the many needs of human society.

From the most famous example of Emperor Julian Apostate (361-363), who in his attempt to revive paganism lamented the fact that Christ's disciples extended philanthropy even to pagans in need<sup>1</sup>, to the institutionalization of philanthropy and social welfare in the time of the founding of universities<sup>2</sup> and in the contemporary period, we can witness numerous testimonies in which the Church has shown its service as a Good Samaritan.

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<sup>1</sup> Salaminius Hermias SOZOMENUS, "Historia Ecclesiastica, Libro V, 16: Arsacio sacerdoti Galatiae", in: J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca (PG)*, vol. 57, col. 1262D-1266, here col. 1263: (pers. transl.) "It would be shameful, while the Jews have no beggars, and the ungodly Galileans (Christians) feed their poor and ours together, to see that our needy people lack the help we owe them"

<sup>2</sup> University of Salerno seems to be older than the one in Bologna and known at the time particularly as a very good medical school, with very close links to the Byzantine East: cfr. Charles H. HASKINS, "L'origine delle università", in: Girolamo ARNALDI, *Le origini dell'Università, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1974, p. 33-84, here p. 36; see also Prof. Leontin POPESCU, Începuturile învățământului universitar european, ISTROS, Brăila, 2012, p. 38.*

## 1. THE VIRTUE OF LOVE AS A PROMOTER OF PHILANTHROPY IN THE CHURCH

Philanthropy, almsgiving, welcoming strangers, caring for orphans and widows, healing and comforting the sick, all exercised by the Church throughout the ages, are all manifestations of the virtue of love fully exemplified by God through His Son Jesus Christ Himself by means of two healing actions: on the soul through the forgiveness of sins and the power of the evangelistic word, and on the body through the power of miraculous healing. The Gospel texts show that Jesus heals the souls of the sick first and then their bodies: their sins are forgiven, their faith heals them, they are saved. And from this point of view, Christ's therapeutic work is an integral part of the work of salvation of the human race. St. Matthew the Evangelist thus sums up the Saviour's mission: "*And Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all sickness and all disease among the people. And the news of Him went throughout all Syria, and they brought to Him all who were suffering from many diseases and afflictions, the possessed, the lunatics, the weak, and He healed them*" (Matthew 4:23-24). For this the Saviour is recognised and glorified as the Greatest Physician, not only of souls but also of bodies<sup>3</sup>.

In both East and West, the title "physician" has been attributed not only to Christ the Saviour, but also to the prophets and great personalities of the Old Testament, as well as to apostles, bishops, priests, deacons and churchmen<sup>4</sup>. Analogously, the Holy Fathers of the ancient Christian period assumed notions and metaphors from the medical practice of their time to illustrate the various moments and modes of spiritual therapy. St. John Chrysostom's statement on the priesthood and the priest is famous: "*Those who heal people's bodies have at their disposal a great quantity of medicines, all sorts of medical instruments and foods suitable for the sick; (...). But for priests there is no other tool or method of healing than using words to teach*"<sup>5</sup>.

In this metaphor of *Christ the Physician*, Christians define the ideal physician, what a physician should be: as a *bonus medicus*; his moral duty (officium) consisting of love for people (philanthropy); such a physician treats everyone indiscriminately, giving everyone the right medicines; free treatment; he also assists the hopelessly ill and considers it an honour to cure diseases that cause disgust.

The image of Christ as the Physician provides an opportunity in this period to deal argumentatively with certain aspects of the professional behaviour of the physician in general, while at the same time establishing a parallel with Christ's action towards the believer. Thus, the first contact between doctor and patient is normally based on a relationship of trust, whereas in the case of Christ, He takes all the initiative by coming to the aid of the one in need<sup>6</sup>. The characteristics of the ideal Christian doctor, modelled on the *medicus bonus* par excellence, i.e. Christ, are directly or indirectly derived from all the late ancient medical literature (4th and 5th centuries) which is strongly influenced on the one

<sup>3</sup> Calisto VENDRAME, "La guarigione dei malati come parte integrante dell'evangelizzazione", in: *Camillianum*, 2 (1991), p. 28-35, here p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Clementina MAZZUCCO, "Gesù e le guarigioni di indemoniati", in: *Io sono il Signore, colui che ti guarisce. Illness versus religion between ancient and modern. Atti del Convegno internazionale, Roma, 26-29 maggio 2010*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2011, p. 179-197, here p. 196-197.

<sup>5</sup> ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, "De sacerdotio", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 48, col. 623-692, here IV, 3, col. 665.

<sup>6</sup> Sandro SPINSANTI, "Medico", in: *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia Morale*, San Paolo -Cinselo Balsamon, Milan, 1990, p. 736-749, here, p. 740.

hand by the decline of research and on the other hand it is more sensitive than ever to the practical needs of the ordinary patient<sup>7</sup>.

The image of Christ - MEDICUS in the first three centuries of Christianity was not forgotten, but on the contrary the help and concern for the suffering led to the creation of a culture<sup>8</sup> of philanthropy and assistance to the sick over time in the form of a triple imperative: - care for the sick and needy must be universal without any discrimination according to the words of St. Apostle Paul. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor freedom, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28); - care for the sick must be an expression of God's love shown through His Son, Jesus Christ, who received and healed all the sick; - the defence of the life of every person in need from conception to the natural end of man's life.

The first sign that the Church founded on the sacrifice of Christ is interested in those in suffering and in need was the valorization of man in a new anthropological vision: personalist-ontological. Man is the person engaged in a dialogue with God and with his fellow human beings. In the Christian vision, expressed in the first chapters of Genesis, it is evident how God established a hierarchy of values among creatures. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, is placed at the centre and summit of creation, not only because all that exists is destined for him, but above all because by reflecting the radiance of the divine image and imitating his Creator in love he has the duty that through him the whole of creation may reach complete perfection. From this perspective, only man of all creatures can be and is a person<sup>9</sup>.

The term *person* in Eastern Christianity has such a great value that Orthodox Theology explains by it both the Incarnation of the Son of God<sup>10</sup> and all His saving acts precisely because man is that being who is oriented towards God<sup>11</sup> and bears in himself His image. From this point of view all the pastoral action of the Church has a *prosopocentric* character<sup>12</sup>. The person of Christ is the prototype of every Christian facing sickness, suffering and pain. Christ became incarnate, suffered, was crucified and died not to eliminate suffering, but to transfigure it into obedience<sup>13</sup>.

This vision of man, even if it was not systematized as we know it today, is present even in the Acts of the Apostles, where the apostles bring into existence the institution of the diaconate both to materially help the needy through agape and to spiritually nourishing them

<sup>7</sup> Innocenzo MAZZINI, "La Letteratura Cristiana Antica e la Medicina (II)", in: *Les Études Classiques*, 71 (2003), p. 241-261, here p. 251-252.

<sup>8</sup> Antonio CASERA, "Storia della sanità e dell'azione della Chiesa nel mondo sanitario", in: Gian Maria COMOLLI and Italo MONTICELLI, *Manuale di Pastorale sanitaria*, Edizioni Camilliane, Turin, 1999, p. 63-73, here p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> MANLIUS SEVERINUS BOETHIUS, "Liber de persona et duabus naturis", in: J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae (PL)* 64, 1337D-1354D, 1343B: "From all this, it is clear that there can be no question of person in lifeless bodies; no one says that there is a person of the stone, of living creatures without sentience. There is no person of the tree or of beings without intelligence and reason, of the horse or the ox and the other animals that lead their lives dumb and without reason, living only by the senses. But we say that there is a person of man, of God, of the angel."

<sup>10</sup> Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. III, 3rd edition, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Dominique BEAUFLIS & com, *Bioethics and the Mystery of the Person. Perspective ortodoxe*, translated from the French by Nicoleta Petuhov, Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 2005, p. 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> The focus is on the person. From the Greek *προσωπον* - person.

<sup>13</sup> Leontin POPESCU, "Suffering in Holy Scripture", in *Theology and Education in the Lower Danube*, Archdiocese of the Lower Danube, Galati, 2020, p. 200-221, here 218.

through the Holy Eucharist. Deacon means "servant" and at the time of the Acts of the Apostles it represented the mission that needed to be developed within a community-Church that felt the need and urgency to provide pastoral care for the poor, homeless, widows and orphans. The "Constitutions of the Apostles" says of the members of this diaconate institution that they are "the eye, the heart, the soul of the bishop for the sick and the poor, and they are to keep a record of those in distress and in need, constantly informing the bishop"<sup>14</sup>. Along with the institution of the diaconate, many hospital houses appeared, called *domus episcopus* those days because they were located near the bishop's residence and became archetypes of modern hospital institutions<sup>15</sup>.

In the apostolic and post apostolic period, the ministry of helping the sick and needy will be concomitant with the proclamation of the Gospel, continually strengthening itself in the confrontation of Christianity with Greek philosophy, especially with the cynic-stoic philosophy in which the philosophers presented themselves as doctors capable of healing the passions of the soul<sup>16</sup>. In general, research on patristic medicine attests to a positive appreciation for the science of medicine on the part of Christians. But inevitably over time there have also been tensions and even some rejections<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. "CHRIST MEDICUS" IN THE TIME OF THE APOLOGISTS

All Christian apologists combat the mysteries and gnosis of the Greek philosophers as "diabolical imitations" of Christian truth, the image of *Christ MEDICUS* thus acquiring great force and being transferred to the dogmatic and catechetical realm as a counter-image of the ancient god of medicine Asklepios with numerous cult temples throughout the Mediterranean Sea basin<sup>18</sup>, the center being in the city of Pergamum<sup>19</sup>.

The 2nd century was the age of medical personalities such as Soranus and Galenus<sup>20</sup> who gave a strong impetus to medicine and awakened enthusiasm for the medical art; it was also the century in which the cult of Asklepios developed greatly, being assigned the title of *sotér* (saviour) for the miraculous cures attributed to him by his believers, a fact

<sup>14</sup> CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLICAE, III, 19, in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 01, col. 501-1156, here col. 802C-803A; see also DISDASCALIA ET CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLORUM, III, 13, 2-7, in: Franciscus Xaverius Funk, vol.1, Paderbonae, Libraria Ferdinardi Schoeningh, 1905, p. 212-216: (pers. transl.) "Therefore, if the Lord has done this, you deacons do not hesitate to do this for the helpless and the weak, because you are workers of the truth, conformed to the example of Christ. Serve therefore with love, without murmuring or doubting; for if you do so, you do that for man and not for God, and you will receive your reward alike your diaconate on visit day. Therefore it is necessary that you deacons visit all who are in need. And as for those in need, report to the bishop; and you must be his soul and mind in all things moved and obedient to him."

<sup>15</sup> Giorgio COSMACINI, *Long art. Storia della medicina dall'antichità a oggi*, Laterza, Bari 2009, p. 117-118.

<sup>16</sup> Vincenzo LOMBINO, "Medico (Cristo)", in: *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane F-O*, Maerietti, Genova-Milani, 2007, p. 3168-3181, here p. 3169.

<sup>17</sup> Enrico DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina. L'assistenza e la cura dei malati", in: *Studi sull'oriente cristiano*, vol.11, 2 (2007), p. 31-40, here p. 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> V. LOMBINO, "Medico (Christ)", p. 3171.

<sup>19</sup> Vincenzo Marcello LA MATINA, "Il posto del malato tra ethos e logos. Luoghi di cura e saperi nel mondo antico e tardoantico", in: *Medic. Metodologia Didattica e Innovazione Clinica- Nuova Serie*, vol. 15, nr. 2, Editore Ospedaletto, Pisa : Pacini, 2007, p. 17-31, here p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Immacolata AULISA, "Medicina umana e medicina divina nella polemica tra giudei e cristiani: le fonti agiografiche altomedievali", in: *Studi Bitontini, special issue. Atti del Convegno di Studi temp(i)o della sofferenza. Temp(i)o di Dio. Malattia e Religione tra antico e moderno, Bitonto, 16-19 March 2013*, 99-100 (2015), p. 125-154, here p. 130; see also Stefania FORTUNA, "Controversie nella Medicina antica", in: *Medicina nei secoli arte e scienza : rivista di storia della medicina / founded by Luigi Stroppiana*; edited by: Dipartimento di medicina sperimentale, Università degli studi La Sapienza di Roma, 29/3 (2017), p. 741-751.

attested by the numerous votive offerings placed in the sanctuaries of Epidaurus, Cos, Pergamum, Rome or those scattered throughout the Mediterranean<sup>21</sup>. However, the recovery of health has always been considered the fruit of the miraculous action of the god, whose epiphany, direct or mediated by oneiric visions and the incubation rite<sup>22</sup>, was attributed to the healing efficacy of the remedies indicated, even when they were homologous to those prescribed by the secular medicine of the time.

The risk of Jesus of Nazareth being equated with a mere miracle worker or healer was difficult to remove from the very beginning of his public ministry, and all the more so in the religious context of the 2nd-4th centuries, especially in the syncretism promoted by Emperor Commodus and then the Severan dynasty (185-235). The fact that the god of medicine exerted a dangerous fascination on Christians is evident from a simple foray into ancient Christian literature, where not infrequently Christian authors vigorously combat the image of Asklepios superimposed on ancient representations of Christ<sup>23</sup>.

In order to bring to light the true work of Christ for mankind, the ancient Christian writers orchestrated a real strategy, designed to deprive the assimilation of Christ with Asclepius of any credibility. First of all, the Holy Fathers began their protest by entering the same terrain as their pagan adversaries, namely by attacking without hesitation the sacred realm of myth: this is the meaning found in all the authors of the classical tradition, such as epic poets, lyricists and tragedians, who were considered in a way the 'repositories' of pagan myths. Secondly, the Fathers tried to highlight the more scandalous, or even immoral, aspects of the pagan myth in question. By publicly unveiling scandalous moments in connection, for example, with the birth and death of Asklepios, they intended to show that he could in no way be equated with a god; and the accusations of greed and incompetence in the exercise of his profession destroyed his credibility as a man-god. He is clearly reduced to contempt, while any claim he has to compete with Jesus Christ is ridiculed, who instead is preached - only He - as doctor and benefactor, as the world's only saviour.

At the end of this operation, systematically conducted against pagan religion, Jesus Christ could only be left without competitors, because the gods collapsed one by one, and the "gallery of divine figures" suggested for imitation and prayer gradually emptied. It is a natural consequence that places sacred to Asklepios, but not only<sup>24</sup>, should be converted into places of Christian healing. The transition from the cult of Asklepios to that of the saints who were silverless doctors and miracle workers, such as Cyrus and John, Cosmas and Damian, Ilarion, Antony, Thecla, Dimitrios<sup>25</sup>, is understandable and obvious, especially if

<sup>21</sup> Dario DAFFARA, *Samson's Hospital in Constantinople and the care of the sick in the proto-Byzantine world. Specialization thesis*, School of Specialization in Archaeological Heritage, University of Bologna, Bologna, 2014, p. 11-21.

<sup>22</sup> Divinatory rite consisting of sleeping in or near a temple to obtain, in a dream, the answers from a healing god.

<sup>23</sup> Ernesto DE MIRO - Giulia Sfameni GASPARRO - Valentina CALI (eds.), *The cult of Asclepius in the Mediterranean area*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Arigento 20-22 November 2005, Gangemi Editore, ROMA, 2009, p. 265-275.

<sup>24</sup> Giulia Sfameni GASPARRO, "Thaumaturgia e culti terapeutici e taumaturgici nel mondo tardo-antico: fra pagani, ebrei e cristiani", in: *Nuova Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose*, 11, (2008), p. 13-53; (edited by) Enrico DAL COVOLO and Giulia Sfameni GASPARRO, *Cristo e Asclepio. Culti terapeutici e taumaturgici nel mondo mediterraneo antico fra pagani e cristiani*, Atti del Convegno internazionale Accademia di Studi Mediterranei, Agrigento 20-21 November 2006, Las-Roma, 2008, here p. 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Franca Caterina PAPPARELLA, " Sul concetto di malattia e guarigione nell'antichità cristiana. Analisi iconografica e archeologia della devozione", in: *Rivista Biblica*, 3 (2018), p. 423-463, here p. 439-440.



the evangelical exhortation is taken into account: *Heal the helpless, raise the dead, cure the lepers, cast out demons; the gift you have taken is the gift you are giving* (Mt 10:8).

Christian criticism of the cult of Asklepios, according to some biblical scholars<sup>26</sup>, begins as early as St. John the Evangelist, but takes on concrete forms in the period of the apologists who criticize the passions, especially the avarice of such medical gods. Athenagoras<sup>27</sup>, for example, tells the Greeks that a god who should be immortal is above greed, and he cannot manifest himself as a man. One of Asklepius's major faults was in fact that he was a greedy god: "*Among your pagan deities you have not only a blacksmith but also a doctor; the doctor was greedy and Asklepios was his name,*" writes St. Clement of Alexandria<sup>28</sup>. According to Tertullian, Asklepios' "avarice" led in ancient society to the neglect of the science of medicine, which cost him the condemnation of Jupiter who incinerated him with a thunderbolt<sup>29</sup>.

Christ's free-of-cost healing and saving not only those close to him, but also those far away, not only his followers, but also those of different faiths and cults, is unknown in the Olympus to which Asklepios belongs. Aristides the Apologist<sup>30</sup> or the Athenian writes in this respect that for Christians providing service to the neighbor is totally disinterested and is done according to the commandment of Christ even for enemies. Lactantius also states that philanthropy "*is a sign of supreme humanity and it is a great work to care for the sick, who have no one to help them, who must be cared for and comforted*"<sup>31</sup>. St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher is much more direct in considering the cult of Asklepios and the healings in his temples as the work of demons who thus tried to hinder the work of *Christ Medicus*<sup>32</sup>. In the same way St. Justin also proceeds in his *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon* where he explains with pertinent arguments that all the healings performed by Asklepios or similar characters are nothing but diabolical imitations and misappropriations of the prerogatives of Christ, attributed to Him by the Old Testament prophets<sup>33</sup>. Here St. Justin is not arguing with

<sup>26</sup> Ekkart SAUSER, "Christus Medicus - Christus als Arzt und seine Nachfolger im fruhen Christentum (Christ as physician and his followers in early Christianity)", in: *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift*, vol. 101 (1992) 101-123 here p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> ATHENAGORAS ATHENIENSIS PHILOSOPHUS CHRISTIANUS, "Legatio pro cristianis", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 06, col. 890-973, here XXIX,3 col. 956C: (pers. transl.) "*So if these were gods, in this case they paid no attention to gold: gold, a gift most welcome to mortals; neither mother nor children offer equal delight for divinity has no need and is superior to greed; nor could they die but as they are men, and unscrupulous and wicked, they let themselves be overcome by greed for riches*".

<sup>28</sup> SANCTUS CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS EPISCOPUS, "Chohortatio ad gentes - Protrepticus ad Graecos", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 08, col. 49- 246, here col. 102: "*Nec solum aeris fabrum, sed etiam medicum habes inter deos. Is vero avarus erat, et nomen habuit Aesculapi*".

<sup>29</sup> QUINTUS SEPTIMIUS FLORENS TERTULLIANUS, "Apologeticus adversus gentes pro cristianis", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 01, col. 305-604, here col. 407C: (pers. transl.) "*After all, they say, Asklepios against the Fates, i.e. in spite of Jupiter's will, brought back to life certain dead people, bought at a huge price. But for this the lightning struck him, and the subsequent burning, which are evidence of an impure life and character, not at all sincere.*"

<sup>30</sup> ARISTIDES, "Apologia", in *Gli Apologeti Greci*, translated by Carla Burini, Citta Nuova Editrice, Rome, p. 47-59, here p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> Lucius Caecilius Firminianus LACTANTIUS, "Divinarum Institutionum Liber VI", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 06, col. 633-732A, here col. 680BC: "*AEgros quoque, quibus defuerit qui asistat, curandos fovendosque suscipere, summae humanitatis et magnae operationis est*".

<sup>32</sup> SANCTUS JUSTINUS PHILOSOPHUS ET MARTYR, "Apologia prima pro Christianis", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 06, col. 327-440, here col. 362: "*Sed haec, ut diximus pravi daemones perpetrarunt*"

<sup>33</sup> SANCTUS JUSTINUS PHILOSOPHUS ET MARTYR, "Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 06, col. 471-802, here chap. 69, col. 635D: "*Diabolus, dum veritatem aemulatur, invexit fabulas de Baccho, Hercules et Aesculapius*".

pagans, but with Jews, but this does not prevent him from using the myth and cult of Asklepios as a particular aspect of the many-tempered activity of demons. He tells Trypho that the demons, in their endeavour to deceive man, succeed in establishing a direct relationship between the stories of the pagans and Holy Scripture, with the aim of demonstrating that the prophetic announcements are in fact also fulfilled in those who dealt in magic among the pagans. In this way the demons organise a real attempt to mislead those who approach the sacred books. "When the devil presents Asclepius as raising the dead and curing other illnesses," St. Justin asks Trypho, "must I not say that in this aspect too he imitates the prophecies concerning Christ?"<sup>34</sup>.

In dissonance with the other Greek apologists, Theophilus of Antioch captures the activity of the *medicus bonus* in the person of God the Father, who freely carries out His work of salvation and healing through Logos and Wisdom, thus affirming the common work of the persons of the Holy Trinity for the salvation of man<sup>35</sup>. Likewise St. Irenaeus of Leo in *Adversus Haeresis*<sup>36</sup> presents either the image of Christ Medicus or the image of God as a Good Physician who proves His skill in healing sick humanity. St Ignatius Theophorus also writes to the Ephesians<sup>37</sup> that the body of Christ is the only bread that "is the medicine of immortality", an antidote to death, the food of eternal life within Jesus Christ.

In the third century, it was the Alexandrians who gave a fuller definition to the metaphor of *Christ medicus*. In particular, special attention to medical practice is evidenced by Origen when he states that "it is necessary to know the method and principles of medicine, not only to know what to do, how to act, to intervene on a wound, to establish a sober and strict measure, diet, to feel the fire of fever in the beat of the pulse, to dry, temper and restrain the abundance of moisture in the cycles of treatment. If one knows only these things and does not follow them with action, his knowledge will be useless"<sup>38</sup>. It is also Origen who strikes a balance between medicine as a science and the pedagogical value of suffering in Eastern mysticism by considering the art of medicine as a gift from God: "Religious people," says Origen, "appeal to physicians as collaborators of God, knowing full well that He has given to men, like all other sciences, the science of medicine and that it was He who commanded the earth to grow herbs. In any case, religious people also know that the art of medicine can do nothing if God does not want it to, and that it can do a great deal

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, 638A: "Cum autem AEsculapium muortuos excitantem et alios morbos curantem inducit, nonne edita de Christo vaticinia in hoc quoque similiter imitatum dixerim?"

<sup>35</sup> S.THEOPHILUS ANTIOCHENUS, "Libri tres ad Autolyicum", in: J.P. Migne, PG 06, col. 1023-1175, here col. 1033: "Quis est iste medicus? Deus qui per Verbum et Sapientiam sanat et vivicat. Deus per Verbum te sapientiam condidit universa;" (Who is this doctor? God who heals and gives life through Word and Wisdom. God created the whole universe by His Word and Wisdom.)

<sup>36</sup> SANCTUS IRENAEUS, episcopus Lugdunensisi et Martyr, "Adversus Haereses libri quinque", III, 5, 2, in: J.P. Migne, PG 07,1, col. 433- 1224, here col. 359: "For the Lord has come as a Physician [to us], as He Himself confessed: 'It is not the healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. For I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners' (Mk. 2:17; Lev. 5:31-32).

<sup>37</sup> SANCTUS IGNATIUS, "Epistola ad Ephesios", in: J.P. Migne, PG 05, col. 643-662B, here col. 662B: "Filius est hominis et Filius Dei, ut obediatis episcopo et presbyterio mente indivulsa, frangentes panem unum, qui pharmacum cum immortalitatis est, antidotum, ne moriamur, sed vivamus semper in Jesu Christo".

<sup>38</sup> ORIGEN, "Homiliae in Lucam", in: J.P. Migne PG 13, col 1801-1900, here I, col. 1804: "Velut in medicina oportet me rationem et dogmata scire medicinae, non ut tantummodo noverim quid debeam facere, sed ut faciam, id est, ut secem vulnera, victum moderatum castigatumque disponam aestus febrium in pulsum venarum sentiam, ut curationibus cyclis humorum abundantiam siccem, temperem atque restringam. Quae si quis tantum scierit et non opere fuerit subsecutus, cassa erit eius scientia."

when God wants it to"<sup>39</sup>. In his opinion, God cooperates in the action of the ordinary physician, but this does not prevent the Alexandrian from having a natural conception of bodily medicine; diseases and infirmities of the body have their natural causes and cannot always be considered the consequences of sins. Origen insists on the necessity of going to the doctor for the recovery of bodily health. Origen therefore considers medicine essential for humanity<sup>40</sup> and recommends it to believers, but he is also convinced of the option of healing through prayer for those who are spiritually evolved<sup>41</sup>. St. Gregory of Nyssa also expresses the same idea, defining Christ as "the true doctor of the sufferings of the soul"<sup>42</sup>.

For Origen, as for Clement the Alexandrian<sup>43</sup>, medicine and the knowledge of God's word are comparable, because both are necessary for human life, so that the image of *Christ Medicus* takes an important place both in catechetical and spiritual discourse, but also in apologetics<sup>44</sup> as we shall see in St. Athanasius<sup>45</sup> and St. Cyril of Jerusalem<sup>46</sup> and just as strongly in the Cappadocian Saints.

The metaphor of *Christ medicus* not only alludes to Christ's work of salvation, but Christ is actually defined as the one who heals both body and soul at once, "the only physician of bodies and souls" who heals those who call upon Him in diseases of body and spirit<sup>47</sup>. Between the 4th and 5th centuries, in the West, the figure of Christ Medicus is used less for apologetic purposes, but it acquires theological depth in this period<sup>48</sup>. St Ambrose<sup>49</sup>

<sup>39</sup> ORIGENES, "Adnotationem in Librum III Regum.", in: J.P. Migne PG 17, col 53-56, here col. 54C-55A: "*Qui enim religione sunt praediti, utuntur quidem medicis tanquam ministris Dei, sciens quod et medicam scientiam ipse largitus est hominibus, quemadmodum et reliquas herbas quoque ipse de terra germinare edixit. Sciunt tamen nihilominus, nihil posse, quantum Deus vult*".

<sup>40</sup> ORIGEN, "Contra Celsum", in: J.P. Migne PG 11, col. 637-1632, here, Liber III, 12C, col.934C: "*Itaque quoniam commoda, imo necessaria generi humano medicina est*".

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, Liber VIII, 60, col. 1607C: "*Sed medicinae ope quaerenda est sanitas, si quis simplicem et communem vitam velit ducere; si autem vulgari praestantiorum, pietate in summum Deum et fuis ad illum precibus*".

<sup>42</sup> SANCTUS GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, "De Oratione Domenica", in: J.P. Migne PG 44, col. 1119-1194, here col. 1161D: "*Verus igitur animae vitiorum et morborum medicus est*".

<sup>43</sup> CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS EPISCOPUS, "Paedagogus", in: J.P. Migne, PG 08, col. 247-684, here col. 320BC.

<sup>44</sup> V. LOMBINO, "Medico (Christ)", p. 3173.

<sup>45</sup> SANCTUS ATHANASIUS ALEXANDRINUS ARCHIEPISCOPUS, "Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi", in: J.P. Migne, PG 25, col. 95-197, here col. 127BC; 174C: (pers. transl.) "*But for this He became man, and there was need to heal what was, it was fitting that the Physician and Saviour should approach the things that were built to heal them*".

<sup>46</sup> CYRILLUS HIEROSOLYMITANUS, "Catecheses", in: J.P. Migne, PG 33, col. 331-1059, here Catechesis II, 6, col. 414C: (pers. transl.) "*All your sins added together do not overcome the greatness of God's mercy! Your wounds do not overcome His great medical skill! Give only yourself in faith!* Catechesis X, 13, col. 678: "*In Hebrew 'Jesus' means 'Savior' and in Greek 'healer'. For He is the doctor of souls and bodies and the healer of those held by evil spirits. He also heals the eyes of the blind, but also enlightens the mind. He is the doctor of the lame, but He also directs the feet of sinners to repentance*".

<sup>47</sup> ORIGEN, "Homiliae in Leviticum", in: J.P. Migne PG 12, col. 405-573, here Homily VII, col. 476B: (pers. transl.) "*Now, however, the physician of souls and bodies, and at the same time the Lord, commands us to beware of the weeds of drunkenness and fornication*".

<sup>48</sup> I. AULISA, "Human Medicine...", p. 131.

<sup>49</sup> SANCTUS AMBROSIUS, "De Helia et Ieiunio", in: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL)* 33, ex recensione: Carolus Schenkl, Vindobonae, Lipsiae, 1897, p. 411-465, here 457-458: (pers. transl.) "*And if we have been subject to him in any way, now, we are no refuge for the doctor, he has healed the wounds from above, and if any bitterness remains, the medicine will not lack, even if we have done any harm, he will not remember who once did it, even if we have sinned grievously, we have found a great doctor, receiving his grace and gift as a great cure; for great medicine removes great sins. We have yet more support, with which we*



for example, preaches the need for conversion and the hope of finding forgiveness in Christ, the True Saviour Medicus for the forgiveness of sins and spiritual healing<sup>50</sup>. Augustine<sup>51</sup> deepens the theological meaning of the names *medicus* and *savior* attributed to Christ by urging both doctors and patients to realize that only God can truly heal. Augustine is among the first to insist not only on the confident use of medical science, but also on another necessity typical of Hippocratic medicine: that of going beyond the symptom and looking for the causes of the disease: "*When a physician wants to eradicate a disease, if he confines himself to treating the disease and not the cause that produced it, it seems to be cured for a while, while the cause remains, the disease reappears*"<sup>52</sup>.

In another work: "*De civitate Dei*", Fer. Augustine emphasises on the one hand the frequent ineffectiveness of medicine and its painful remedies, which often add to the pain already caused by the disease, and on the other hand, miraculous cures and cures obtained by faith or miracles following the manifestation of faith, which are valued<sup>53</sup>. Somewhat later, St. John Damascene would also express mostly the same ideas, considering the need to examine the disease starting from the nature of the whole: constitution, place, time, age. "*An expert physician - writes St. John Damaschin - does not administer the same type of remedy to all and not always, but gives the medicine to each according to constitution, place, illness, time and age. Therefore, he treats the infant in one way, the older in another, the sick one way and the healthy in another, and not even the sick in the same way, but on the basis of their condition and illness and takes into account their state of health, so as to provide one remedy in summer, another in winter, another in spring, another in autumn and finally another for each place according to the differences of the regions*"<sup>54</sup>.

In the West, St. Benedict of Nursia was among the last to contribute to the use of the metaphor of Christ Medicus, which later slowly lost its theological impact<sup>55</sup>; in the early Middle Ages, the power of *Christ Medicus*, slowly, slowly passed to the silverless holy doctors, famous both in the East and West. On the other hand, the title of "spiritual doctor"

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*redeem our sins, you have money, redeem your sin. The Lord is not for sale, but you yourself are for sale, you have been sold for your sins: redeem yourself with your deeds, redeem yourself with your money."*

<sup>50</sup> SANCTUS AMBROSIUS, "De Cain et Abel", in: CSEL 32, ex recensione: Carolus Schenkl, Vindobonae, Lipsiae, 1897p. 339- 409, here p. 388: (pers. trans.) "*The Redeemer of the Levites is such a wise man, who, like a physician, heals the minds of the sick and sprinkles certain medicines of the stronger mind, imitating that physician who came from heaven to show men the ways of wisdom and to reveal to the little ones the ways of wisdom, for he saw that the afflicted could not be healed without remedy and therefore he administered cures to the sick, therefore he brought health to help all, so that whoever perished might ascribe to himself the causes of his death. But mercy will be preached to all, for those who perish through their own indifference will perish, but those who are saved according to the will of Christ will be delivered, He who wants all men to be saved and to come to know the truth.*"

<sup>51</sup> S. AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS, "Sermo 155, 10", in: J.P. Migne, PL 38, col. 840 -849, here col. 846-847: (pers. transl.) "*But medicine was invented for this reason, that vice might be banished and nature cured. That is why the Saviour came to the human race, He found no one healthy, that is why the great physician came*".

<sup>52</sup> S. AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS, "In Ioannis Evangelicum", in: J.P. Migne, PL 35, col. 1379-1976, here Tractatus 25, 16, col. 1604: "*Medicus quando aegritudinem discutit, si curet quod per aliquam causam factum est, et ipsam causam qua factum est non curet, ad tempus videtur mederi, causa manente morbus repetitur*".

<sup>53</sup> S. AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS, "De civitate Dei", in: J.P. Migne, PL 41, col. 13-804, here Liber XXII, 8 and 22, col. 760-771: "*De miraculis, quae ut mundus in Christum crederet facta sunt et fierimundo credente non desinunt*"; 784-787: "*De miseriis ac malis, quibus humanum genus merito primae praevaricationis obnoxium est et a quibus nemo nisi per Christi gratiam liberatur*".

<sup>54</sup> SANCTUS JOANNES DAMASCENUS, "Pro Sacris Imaginibus Orationes tres", in: J.P. Migne, PG 94, col. 1227-1421, here col. 1289B.

<sup>55</sup> I. AULISA, "Medicina umana...", p. 132; see also V. LOMBINO, "Medico (Cristo)", p. 3180.

attributed both in the East and in the West to bishops, compared even by the Apostolic Constitutions<sup>56</sup> to *spiritual surgeons*, through St. Athanasius who writes the Life of St. Anthony the Great called "the physician of Egypt"<sup>57</sup> goes on to designate the monk as the spiritual physician, able to cure the diseases of the soul. St. John Cassian<sup>58</sup> through his writings also spreads within the Latin monastic world the faith in *Christ the Physician* who uses the methods of the medical science to heal the passions of the body and soul. In the following centuries, the metaphor of *Christ the Physician*, while it remains present in certain theologians and spiritual fathers, will gradually lose its vigour for specific doctrinal themes<sup>59</sup>.

### 3. PATRISTIC MEDICINE AND CARE FOR THE SICK AFTER THE FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA 325

Since the 4th century a number of concomitant causes caused Greek-speaking societies to evolve differently from Western societies, creating favourable conditions in Byzantine cities for the emergence and development of philanthropic institutions mainly for the assistance of poor citizens, foreign immigrants or pilgrims<sup>60</sup>. The Holy Fathers of the First Synod of Nicaea 325 recommended in canon 70 of the so-called "Arabic paraphrase"<sup>61</sup> that centres for pilgrims, foreigners, the disabled, and widows<sup>62</sup> be organized in every city. Philanthropic assistance is even better organized during the so-called "Constantinian peace"<sup>63</sup>

<sup>56</sup> CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLICAE, II, 41, PG 01, col. 698BC-699A; see also DISDASCALIA ET CONSTITUTIONES APOSTOLORUM, II, 41,1-10, in: Franciscus Xaverius Funk, vol.1, p. 130-132: (pers. transl.) "*Therefore, like a compassionate physician, He cares for all sinners and uses all prudence and brings healing to sustain their lives, and does not hasten to cut off the members of the Church, but uses the word of the scriptures and chastisements to soften everything with the bandage of prayer. For a deep ulcer is made by the melting of the flesh, the cure of which is equal to welcome medicines; but if it becomes ugly, cleanse it with a biting cure, that is, with the word of reproof. But if the flesh comes out, scratch it and treat it with a sharp medicine, that is, with a threatening judgment. And if there is a cancer, cauterize it with fire, i.e. by imposing many fasts, cutting and purifying the putrid ulcer. But if the ulcer becomes even larger and defies even cauterization and is foul-smelling, then, taking counsel with other physicians and after much meditation, amputate that foul-smelling member, lest it spoil the whole body of the Church. Therefore do not hasten to cut, nor rush immediately, nor run to a saw armed with many teeth, but first use a chisel and open the ulcer, so that the cause of the hidden disease, such as it is within, may be seen and clearly understood, so that the whole body may be kept free from pain. But if you see anyone who does not repent and offers no hope, cut him off with sorrow and grief and banish him from the Church.*"

<sup>57</sup> S. ATHANASIUS, "Vita Sancti Antonii", in: J.P. Migne, PG 26, col. 835-978, here col. 966A: "*Demum quasi medicus Aegypto a Deo datus erat*". (Finally, he had been given by God as physician to Egypt).

<sup>58</sup> IOHANNIS CASSIANI, "De Institutis Coenobiorum et de Octo Principalium Uitiorum Remediis", in: CSEL 17, ex recensione Michaelis Petschenig, Vindebonae, 1888, p. 5-68, here. XII, 8, p. 211: (pers. transl.) "*And therefore God, the creator and physician of the universe, knowing that the beginning and cause of sickness is pride, has been able to cure opposites by means of opposites, so that it may be known that those who have fallen through pride will rise through humility*"; see also STS. JOHN CASSIAN, "The Monastic Settlements", in: *Fathers and Church Writers*, vol. 57, Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1990, p. 109-265, here p. 252.

<sup>59</sup> V. LOMBINO, "Medico (Cristo)", p. 3180.

<sup>60</sup> E. DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Giovanni ZANNINELLO, *Storia della Medicina. Breve Epitome*, Edizioni Nuova Scintilla, Chioggia, 2007, p. 29; see also: A. CASERA, "Storia della sanita...", p. 64; E. DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> E. DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 5; see also A. CASERA, "Storia della sanita...", p. 64.

<sup>63</sup> Glen L. THOMPSON, "The Pax Constantiniana and the Roman Episcopate", in *The Bishop of Rome. in Late Antiquity*, Edited by Geoffrey D. Dunn, Australian Catholic University, Ashgate Publishing, UK Farnham, Surrey, 2015, pp. 17-36.

with structures specific to charitable needs, but also with a specific administrative organization. Fer. Augustin<sup>64</sup> and Fer. Jerome<sup>65</sup> mention the *matricula pauperum* and the *descripta viduarum* respectively, which were nothing more than lists of the needy<sup>66</sup>. Some of the buildings assigned for the needy in this period were not slow to show quite obvious features related to medicine and the cure of diseases, especially in the great centres of oriental culture, Caesarea, Antioch, Alexandria. St. Basil the Great, as it is well known, built between 370-374<sup>67</sup> at Caesarea an establishment compared by St. Gregory of Nazianz to a city<sup>68</sup>, not only because of its size but especially because of the way it was organised: in sections with separate buildings, differentiated according to categories of patients: temporary or chronic, incurable. He himself<sup>69</sup> speaks of this welfare complex that stood at the gates of Caesarea Cappadocia, which he himself called *katagògia*<sup>70</sup> as a specialised residence (to live in) with everything it needed: doctors, administrators, auxiliary staff. At other times, St. Basil<sup>71</sup> defines it as *prochotropeion* - house of maintenance for the poor which meant that the assistance of those in need extended to all levels: sick, poor, strangers, pilgrims for which throughout history it also received the generic name of *Basiliada*<sup>72</sup>.

From St. Basil the Great onwards, all the other Eastern Fathers will always be present in the care and organization of such centers of medical and social assistance. Another example in this regard is St. John Chrysostom, who in his turn will administer and open a series of medical establishments, first in Antioch and then in Constantinople under the name

<sup>64</sup> SANCTUS AURELIUS AUGUSTINUS, "Epistolae ex Duobus Codicibus nuper in Lucem Prolatae. Epistola 20 ad Fabiolam", in: CSEL 88, reprinted Johannes Diujak, Vindobonae, Wien, 1981, p. 94-112, here p. 95: "And so this became the record of the poor whom the Church maintains, and by this all began to be under our care within God's mercy".

<sup>65</sup> Eusebius HIERONYMUS, "Epistle 92", in: J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae (PL)*22, col. 756-769, here col. 766: (pers. transl.) "Describes how, for the bishops to consider it, a list of widows was drawn up, in order to make the appropriate alms for the relief of pain".

<sup>66</sup> Charles MUNIER - Aangelo DI BERARDINO, "Opere di Assistenza e di Carità", in: *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane F-O*, Maerietti, Genova-Milani, 2007, p. 3627-3632, here p. 3631.

<sup>67</sup> Vincenzo Marcello LA MATINA, "Il posto del malato...", p. 22; see also: E. DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> SANCTUS GREGORIUS THEOLOGUS, Archiepiscopus Constantinopolitanus, "Oratio 43- In laudem Basilii Magni", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 36, col. 494-606, here col. 578: "What else? A noble thing is philanthropy and support of the poor and assistance to human weakness. Go a little out of the city, and **behold the new city**, that storehouse of godliness, the common treasury of the rich, in which the surplus of their wealth, yes, and even what they need, are deposited, as consequence of his encouragements, freed from the power of the moth, no longer pleasing the eyes of the thief, and escaping both the strife of envy and the corruption of time: where sickness is regarded in a religious light, and disaster is thought of as a blessing, and sympathy is put to the test."

<sup>69</sup> SANCTUS BASILIUS MAGNUS, CAESARIENSIS EPISCOPUS, "Epistolarum Classis II. Epistola 94", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 32, col. 486C-490A, here col. 487C: (pers. transl.) "And also to whom do we cause offence, while we build hospices for strangers, whether they pass by, or for those who need some medicine for their sickness, and thus make it necessary to comfort them and their sick companions; physicians, beasts of burden, conductors? To these it has been necessary to add other trades, both those which are necessary to life, and those which are designed for a more honourable institution of life; things which, in their totality, are a true adornment to our city, and grounds for pride for our governor, for upon him also the good fame of these works is showered."

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 488C.

<sup>71</sup> S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, "Epistola 150", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 32, col. 601A-606D, here col. 604C: "prohotrfeion"; 603C: "pauperum hospitium"

<sup>72</sup> D. DAFFARA, *L'Ospedale di Sansone...*, p. 41.

of *nosocomion*<sup>73</sup>. Many other such hospitals would appear in the East and especially in Constantinople towards the end of the 5th century, especially under the influence of the martyrdom and activity of the saint silverless doctors (*anargyros*): Cosmas and Damian, Samson<sup>74</sup> and Diomid, Cyrus and John. It will come as no surprise, therefore, to find that in the centuries following the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, which regulated<sup>75</sup> the way in which pilgrims travelled and were received in houses of assistance, differentiated settlements would appear during the 5th and 6th centuries: houses for the poor and chronically ill (*ptocheion, procotropion*), houses of welcome and hospitality (*xenodochium*), leprocioms, houses for the elderly (*gerocomion*), houses for the sick (*nosocomion*), orphanages (*brephotropheion*)<sup>76</sup>. It was Emperor Justinian (482-565) who gave authority and legal personality to all these forms of Christian assistance and healing by entrusting them to monks and monasteries<sup>77</sup>.

In the West, Fer. Jerome<sup>78</sup> (347-422) accredits the establishment of the first hospital in 390 in Rome by the noblewoman Fabiola, influenced by his sermons. He had returned to Rome in 381 from the Calcis desert, where he translated the Latin Bible, the famous Vulgate from Greek and Hebrew-Aramaic. Sick people lying in the markets, tired of poverty and famine, were gathered in the hospital of the noble Fabiola. When she died, the people of Rome paid tribute to her in gratitude for caring for the poor, comparable to that of a conqueror<sup>79</sup>. Also in the same period, Fer. Jerome<sup>80</sup> also mentions a wealthy Roman widow named Marcella who adapted her own palace to serve as a convent for nuns.

Fabiola and Marcella were not paid by the State or anyone else: they were, as we would say today, volunteers for life, moved by the love of Christ and integrated into the institution they founded. The charitable works of Fabiola and Marcella in the West and St.

<sup>73</sup> E. DAL COVOLO, "I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 5; see also D. DAFFARA, *L'Ospedale di Sansone...*, p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> D. DAFFARA, *L'Ospedale di Sansone...*, p. 29; 44: Samson was a doctor from Rome who came to Constantinople under Justinian and founded a health resort for the poor, adapting his modest home for this purpose. The emperor became seriously ill and was only able to recover thanks to Samson's care; to show his gratitude, Justinian rebuilt the modest shelter, creating a large hospital.

<sup>75</sup> Prof. Ioan N. FLOCA, *Canons of the Orthodox Church. Notes and comments*, Sibiu, 2005, p.95: CANON 11 (CANONICAL LETTERS OR EPISTOLES): "I have ordained (decided) that all the poor and those who need help should travel, after temptation (and verification), with letters and that is only with ecclesiastical letters of peace, not with letters of recommendation (of entrustment), because letters of recommendation should be given only to faces (persons) who are under suspicion".

<sup>76</sup> Jole AGRIMI and Chiara CRISCANI, "Carita e assistenza nella civiltà cristiana medievale", in: J. AGRIMI-J.N. BIRABEN - C. CRISCANI & com., *Storia del pensiero Medico Occidentale. I. Antichità e Medioevo*, Editore Laterza, Bari, 1993, p. 217-259, here p. 235; see also D. DAFFARA, *L'Ospedale di Sansone...*, p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> Gian Maria COMOLLI, *Compendio di Pastorale della Salute*, Editoriale Romani, Savona, 2018, p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> E. HIERONYMUS, "Epistle 77", in: J.P. Migne, *PL 22*, col. 690-698, here col. 694: (pers. transl.) "She sold his wealth and with the money raised he prepared for the use of the poor, she established the first nosocomial, in which to gather the sick from the streets and heal the limbs of the poor, worn out by fatigue and hunger. Shall I now describe the various diseases of the people? [...] How many times has she carried the burden of illness on her own shoulders? How often has she washed the festering wounds that no one else has dared to even look at? [...] I could list all the names of the diseases Fabiola has changed into such a great relief to the poor, that many would envy the poor and weak in health. Not to mention that she behaved freely towards clerics and monks and virgins - that all convents were supported by her resources. Which among the naked and the sick did Fabiola's clothes not cover? On whom among the needy did not her swift and hasty generosity pour out?"

<sup>79</sup> G. ZANNINELLO, *Storia della Medicina...*, p. 28-29; see also G. M. COMOLLI, *Compendio...*, p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> Fer. Jerome writes this noblewoman named Marcella a number of about 16 epistles, starting with Epistle 23, in: J.P. Migne, *PL 22*, col. 425- 480;



Basil in the East later became models for the establishment of various charitable institutions throughout the Middle Ages<sup>81</sup>.

It can be said that in the West the first hospitals, reception centres for the sick, the poor, pilgrims and foreigners called by the same name and with the same meaning of "xenodochi", were born out of the private initiative of noble persons such as Fabiola and Marcella. They organised and adapted them in their own palaces and provided them with the necessities of maintenance and existence by making available their wealth and sometimes even their lives. Somewhat later, in the 5th and 6th centuries, the initiative came from bishops, priests or religious individuals who created 'urban houses of hospitality', usually called by names similar to those in the East: 'Domus Dei', or 'House of God', in Italy; 'God's house' in England; 'Godshuis' in the Netherlands, 'Hotel-Dieu' in France, etc.; many of them operating either within or alongside monasteries, which thus opened their "pensions" for foreign guests, "infirmaries" for the sick and invented a vast pharmacopoeia<sup>82</sup>.

Monasticism in both East and West has played an important role in establishing and achieving an operational configuration that responds to the demands of those in extreme situations of poverty, illness and abandonment. Monasticism manifested and believed that caring for others was one of its primary tasks, and among the various forms of assistance it included medical care. The administration of medical treatment was initially addressed to the monks of the monastery, but when monasteries began to come into contact with urban reality, necessity demanded that medical treatment be extended to the outside world. Therefore, it seems<sup>83</sup> that medical care was born in monasteries to replace natural family care. Both in the Rules of St. Basil the Great<sup>84</sup> in the East and of St. Benedict of Nursia<sup>85</sup> in the West we find sometimes even obligatory recommendations regarding the care of pilgrims, sick strangers and the poor. In every monastery it was thus stipulated that there should be an infirmary, but also a space dedicated to those who were not sick with a staff separate from those who cared for the sick, equipped with a dining room (trapeze) and adequate food. The main motivation in this case, universally found in both East and West, was the belief that the sick are part of the sacred things to be loved and served as Christ Himself<sup>86</sup>. Monasticism generally regarded the science of medicine not only as a beneficial practice for helping one's fellow-man in the distress of illness, but also as a true art and science. Benedictine libraries in general, which were responsible for transcribing, copying and transmitting both philosophical treatises and books of doctrine and spirituality of the

<sup>81</sup> Luigi MEZZADRI and Luigi NUOVO, *Storia della carità*, Jaca Book, Milan 1999, p. 30; see also Knut HAEGER, *Storia illustrata della chirurgia*, Il pensiero scientifico Editore, Rome 1989, p. 56.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32; see also G. M. COMOLLI, *Compendio...*, p. 56.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew T. CRISLIP, *From Monastery to Hospital, Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity*, s.l., University of Michigan Press, 2008, pp. 235, here pp. 39-67.

<sup>84</sup> S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, "Constitutiones monasticae", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 31, col. 1322-1429, here col. 1327B: (pers. transl.) "You have therefore received, beloved, examples and proof; imitate what you will; you may become either the servant of the poor or the lover of Christ's teaching. But if you could imitate both, from both streams you will receive the fruit of salvation."

<sup>85</sup> SANCTUS PATER BENEDICTUS, "Regula commentata", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 66, col. 215-933, here col. 581D: "Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut revera Christo" (Care for the sick must take precedence and superiority over all, so that they may be truly served like Christ himself); 749D: "Omnes supervenientes hospites, tanquam Christus suscipiantur: quia ipse dictus est: Hospes fui, et suscepistis me. Et omnibus congruus honor exhibeantur, maxime domesticis fidei et peregrinis". (All guests who come to the monastery are received like Christ, since one day He will say: "I was a guest and you received me" and due honour is given to all, but especially to our brothers and pilgrims).

<sup>86</sup> A. CASERA, "History of health...", p. 64.

Holy Fathers, also preserved numerous medical codices. The multifunctional activity of the monasteries and of the Church was later recognised by kings and emperors who in turn copied the Church's charitable system and organised a civil health system which has developed step by step to the present day<sup>87</sup>.

Among the monks who became popular and recognized over time for their knowledge of medicine are primarily St. Basil the Great<sup>88</sup> and St. John Chrysostom<sup>89</sup>; St. Basil in "On the Structure of Man" gives a description of the structure of the human body with all the limbs and their functions in the human body; he does the same in his treatise on the creation of the world: Hexaemeron<sup>90</sup> where in addition to the theology of creation he gives a lot of information on physics, botany and medicine. Moreover, in the Great Rules<sup>91</sup>, St. Basil praises medicine, stating that medicine is an art that comes from God for the healing of the body as education and wisdom for the soul. Here he draws a logical parallel between healing the body of suffering through the art of medicine and cleansing the soul of sins. If for the healing of the body - says the holy Father - we endure surgeries, cauterizations and drink bitter medicines, in the same way for the healing of the soul we have to endure the cutting of reprimand and the bitter medicines of epitaphs. Medicine is an art in the vision of the Holy Father, but like any earthly art it is limited and therefore a good collaboration is necessary between the art of healing the body and the art of healing the soul, which is duhodoxy<sup>92</sup>. Likewise, St. Gregory of Nyssa, following the logic and teaching of his brother, in "De hominis opificio"<sup>93</sup>, also gives a detailed anatomical description of the human body, which shows that like all the fathers of the 4th century, he too had a great deal of knowledge of medicine. In the 5th century, Atticus, bishop at Constantinople in the 5th century<sup>94</sup> mentioned by Socrates Scholasticus in his Church History; Nemesius of Emesa<sup>95</sup> (4th century) who writes a treatise "On the nature of man" highly appreciated in the Middle Ages for his outstanding medical knowledge, especially for information on blood circulation. Paul Bishop of Eghina<sup>96</sup> (620-680) writes a "Medical Encyclopedia", in which the disease of cancer is mentioned for the first time.

In the West they were famous and appreciated both by their contemporaries and later in the Middle Ages: Lactantius<sup>97</sup> (sec. II), called as such in the age of Cicero of the Christians, claims that blood is the basis of nutrition for the body and gives a description of the functions of the stomach, kidneys, bone structure and joints of the human body<sup>98</sup>;

<sup>87</sup> G. M. COMOLLI, *Compedio...*, p. 55.

<sup>88</sup> S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, "Oratio II: De hominis structura", in: J.P. Migne *PG* 30, col. 38-68D, here 58C-62D.

<sup>89</sup> In the life of St. Basil the Great we are told that he had a great deal of medical knowledge, as did St. John Chrysostom, considered the protector of epilepsy sufferers;

<sup>90</sup> S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, "Homiliae in Hexaemeron" in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 29, col. 02-207

<sup>91</sup> S. BASILIUS MAGNUS, "Regulae fusius tractatae" in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 31, col. 890-1050, here col. 1043C-1046A.

<sup>92</sup> Leontin POPESCU, "Healing the body between medical practice and Christian moral theology", in *Icoana Credintei. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research*, 5(2017), pp. 69-81, here p. 71.

<sup>93</sup> S. GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, "De Oratione Domenica", in: J.P. Migne *PG* 44, col. 1123-258.

<sup>94</sup> SOCRATES SCHOLASTICUS, "Historia ecclesiastica VII,4", in: J.P. Migne, *PG* 67, col. 30 -843, here col. 746AB.

<sup>95</sup> cf. Johannes QUASTEN, *Patrologia*, vol. II, Marietti, Genoa, 1969, p. 354-358.

<sup>96</sup> cf. Nicolae VĂTĂMANU- Gheorghe BRĂTESCU, *A History of Medicine*, Albatros Publishing House, Bucharest, 1975, p. 156.

<sup>97</sup> LACTANTIUS, "De opicio Dei, vel formatione hominis", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 07, col. 09-78.-430

<sup>98</sup> G. ZANNINELLO, *Storia della Medicina...*, p. 41-42.

Paulinus bishop of Nola<sup>99</sup> in the 4th century; Cassiodorus (485-580) who, after giving up his political functions granted by Emperor Theodosius the Great, comes to Calabria where he builds a monastery - Vivariense - where he will also establish a centre for health studies<sup>100</sup>; A special place is also occupied by St. Gregory the Dialog (Pope Gregorius I Magnus) who in his Dialogues speaks of the power of the saints to heal<sup>101</sup>. The monasteries of Montecasino, Camaldoli and Vallobrosa became famous from this point of view in medieval times.

## CONCLUSION

From its very beginnings, the Church has shown a constant and assiduous concern for the service of those in suffering and social difficulties. In some cases it has had pioneering achievements in filling glaring gaps in civil society. And to reveal all this activity in the service of people would require substantial volumes to be written to tell the story of all this. Alongside medicine, which has been renewed from age to age, Christian communities in both East and West have offered those in need of help not only therapeutic care but also loving closeness and tenderness. And this can easily be seen by exploring the history of medicine, which throughout time has been closely intertwined with the history of Christian philanthropy. In this shared history, the work and involvement of the ancient Church Fathers was influential in at least two ways: doctrinal-theologically and practically as an example of philanthropic service and care for the needy. From a theological-doctrinal point of view, the ancient period was a period of debate and discovery of the truth about Christianity, producing theological treatises which formed the basis of later theological culture and the foundation of the ecumenical synods. As far as we are concerned, the disputes led to the affirmation of "Christ medicus" and the discrediting of all "men of divine origin" and pagan gods as was the case with Asklepios/Esculapius related to the cult of pagan gods and magic.

From a practical point of view, the ancient Church Fathers especially promoted philanthropy based on God's love, which can only be achieved through loving one's fellow-man, by creating structures of medical and social care that are the basis of today's medical and philanthropic institutions. Monasticism gave an early impetus to the organisation of these charitable structures by adopting professional methods of care and treatment. From this point of view, too, we can say that the first hospitals were born from the union of Christian care and professional medicine, inspired also by the Christian hospitality available in establishments with different names: *prochotropeion*, *nosocomion*, *xenodochion*, *gerocomion*, *brephotropheion*, *Domus Dei*.

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<sup>99</sup> E. DAL COVOLO, " I primi cristiani e la medicina...", p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> G. M. COMOLLI, *Compedio...*, p. 55.

<sup>101</sup> SANCTUS GREGORIUS MAGNUS, "Dialogorum", in: J.P. Migne, *PL* 77, col. 149-430, here Liber III, 33, 9 col. 297D.

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