

"THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS" OF THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTMENT

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SUMMARY

The first part of this paper provides a theological and anthropological insight into Christian understanding of the relations between illness, sin, death and Christian salvation idea. The second part of the paper explains the foundation of the present sacramental Church practice with regard to the Jesus's relation to the sick and with regard to the actions taken by the Apostolic Church, as testified in the New Testament, especially in the Epistle of James (Jam 5, 14-15) and as expressed in the teaching of the Church. The third part of the paper emphasizes the therapeutic significance of the Sacrament of Anointing which is analysed through the speech on the sacrament effects which are: relief and spiritual strengthening, forgiveness of sins and preparation for death. In order to realize this "sacramental therapy" in pastoral practice, a certain type of diagnosis of the patient's spiritual condition is needed. Suitable preparation for the sacramental therapy, unified with faith and prayers, is needed as well.

Key words: patient anointing - spiritual relief and care - forgiveness of sins - preparation for death

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INTRODUCTION

Catechism of the Catholic Church starts the presentation of the Sacrament of Anointing, within the context of "the Sacrament of Healing and Service", by claiming that the "illness and suffering have always been considered as the most difficult issues putting human life at stake. In sickness, people experience their helplessness, limitations and temporality. We can see death in every illness" (CCC, 1500). When a person is diagnosed with a medical condition, especially a serious one, we usually say that everything changes. The way you see yourself, others, your own existence and God is changed. Illness can lead a person to the state of anxiety, desperation, fear, revolt against destiny and God, and isolation. However, it can also help you understand your own life, separate relevant from irrelevant and help you find sense and God. Illness became a synonym for questioning the meaning of human existence, even the meaning of existence in general. The experience of illness is determined by life although it contains unattainable truth as it is stated in the Old Testament and the *Book of Job*.

Having in mind fascinating development in the field of medicine and treatment techniques as well as tendencies to remove the source of illness and suffering, we can notice that the modern western civilization and culture is fascinated by death. On the other hand, it tries to minimize and disregard, even hide the fact of death. The result is a culture in which life and death become trivialized and consequently, meaningless. However, Christian understanding of people highly values human life which can be positively affected by suffering. What is more, death can become a decisive step into life. This understanding is founded upon the belief that Jesus Christ is a key of understanding the history and human existence in historical and eschatological perspective.

INSIGHT

In a mysterious way, each person understands and experiences the fact that illness is not just a result of inevitable natural processes. It is not just a coincidence. It has some deeper cause. It is, in a certain manner, connected to evil as such. Therefore, illness is marked and experienced as evil, and evil is further connected to the sin (consciously and willingly committed evil, existence in the state which is characterized by distorted relation with the God, created reality, relatives and oneself). Thus, healing is connected to salvation from the evil and salvation from the consequences of sins. This is how we could outline the basic claims of the Christian theological anthropology which help us correctly understand the nature and effect of the sacrament.

Illness, Sin and Death

Throughout the history, illness, as a step before death, was primarily interpreted within a religious framework. On the one hand, the idea of destiny is in focus. On the other hand, the focus is on the belief that there is a spiritual reality which interacts with physical reality. The result is the necessity to harmonize spiritual and physical component of human life, both individual and joint. Regular relations can be distorted by one's own fault, but also by the fault of others, regardless whether this fault is willing or not, and this can result in, among other things, illness. Various understandings of the source of illness range from the understanding which defines illness as being possessed by evil (unclean spirit) in traditional animistic religions to Buddhist understanding of illness, suffering and death as cleansing means which occur in the process of vicious cycle containing trapped consciousness of divine nature. In Assyrian and Babylonian beliefs, as

well as in Egyptian religion, illness and healing are always interpreted within the context of interaction between physical and spiritual reality. These beliefs can be presented with several images: (1) illness begins after the evil (demon) enters the body, and healing is possible only by forcing the evil (demon) out of the body which occurs during religious processes; (2) illness is an escape of the soul (which presents life principle) from the body, and healing is a return of the soul in the body; (3) illness is a consequence of breaching the law (crossing over to the evil side in the continuous battle between the good and the evil), and healing means establishing the original order. The Greeks were the first ones to start developing systematic medicine based on physiology (cf. Hippocrates). However, Greeks did not define illness and health as purely physiological reality which excludes the spiritual part of human existence.

Biblical report on the original sin of our original parents and its consequences (Post 3) is a representative description of understanding the ultimate source of sin, illness and death in separating a man from the God. Going beyond the original sin is possible only with the God's intervention which is reflected in the choice and offer of the union. These are the basic categories of the Biblical Old Testament theology. By choosing the God and entering the union, the one is blessed and this blessing is reflected in healing: "If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you." (Exodus 15, 26). It can be concluded that there is no illness if the relation between the man and the God is a righteous one. In other words, the illness is a consequence of a distorted relation with the God and such relation is the source of sin.

Nevertheless, this is not easy to solve since the experience of the righteous suffering and sinner's happiness opposes to this simplified logics. On the one hand, it seems that the solution lies in the interconnections existing within the human race (solidarity during good and evil, with collective consequences). However, the Old Testament wisdom literature (*The Preacher, Judith, Tobias*) and especially *the Book of Job* introduce other elements such as the temptation of the faith and belief in incomprehensible God's intentions with the men which are impossible to express (cf. Job 42, 2-6). In the later Old Testament literature, the topic of the resurrection of the death is to be developed further and associated with the reward for the righteous who suffered unduly (Dn 12, 2; Book of Wisdom 2-5; 2Maccabees 7, 2-13; 12.43).

Illness, Meaning and Salvation

We can find the elements for understanding the positive aspect of suffering and even illness in the Old Testament. These elements appear in the story of Moses who offers to sacrifice his own life for the people (Exo-

du 32, 30-33) and Jeremiah whose sufferings become a sign of the God's promised salvation (Jeremiah 15, 18-21). The most significant text on this topic is the fourth Servant Song (Exodus 52, 13-53, 12) which explicitly states that the righteous suffering can act as a salvation and sin atonement in the God's eyes. If the real human solidarity lies in sin (evil), there is no reason why the solidarity cannot exist in the good or sin atonement as well. Therefore, suffering, which is caused by illness, can also be an act of solidarity with the value of support and final atonement. This understanding, especially obvious in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament and late Judaism, shall get a special meaning in the New Testament and redemptive suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

In the "case of Jesus Christ", the issue of suffering is set in its broadest context, philosophical and theological, political and social. H.U. von Balthasar objects that the theology of the second half of the twentieth century transformed into "theological babbling" and that it draws our attention to other, less relevant, questions. One part of theology proclaimed "God's death" or its concealment (actually insignificance) for modern men. Even religion sociologist N. Bellah figuratively states that, in the present world, the God "although quite ill – is not dead" (cf. Tupini, 159).

Two starting points have to be emphasized in order to remain focused on the authentic Christian understanding of the relationship between illness and salvation. The first point is a theological one: confession of the belief in Jesus Christ as the Lord (*Kyrios*) and Saviour (*Soter*). The Church acknowledges Jesus Christ as a "true God and man", Son of the God and man whose *occurrence* (embodiment, teaching, activities and in a special manner, torture, death and resurrection) is an objective reality which embodies God's relation towards men and men's relation towards God. Therefore, the relationship towards Jesus Christ (which can be inclusive but it does not have to always be explicit) is determining for human final eschatological existence. Apart from the mentioned, the Church acknowledges that Jesus Christ, resurrected (glorified), can be met and that he meets us here and now, within the community which is gathered in his name, in his words, in the needed and special activities of worship (sacraments). The second point is of anthropological nature and it refers to the following: a man is a spiritual and physical being whose existence goes beyond death. Definite creation of human life requires meaning. The meaning is discovered through the relation and communication since a man is a rational being or a person. Simply put, in accordance with the Christian anthropology, the creation of human life assumes horizontal (intrapersonal) and vertical (with the "divine") communication. Both communications refer to relevant dimensions of human existence.

Since the Christian religion professes that Jesus Christ is the Saviour, which means "life mediator" or life spirit giver, establishing unity with Christ presents the basic Christian life "creation therapy" and therapy of

creating everything related to life which also includes illness and suffering. From men's point of view, Christian relation with Christ is created primarily through faith that is manifested through prayer (in all its aspects, personal and joint) and through actions inspired by faith. From the God's point of view, response (previous God's actions) can be expressed through joint idea of "God's grace" denoting not only "God's help" (auxilium), but also God's presence and love (Holy Spirit). Special form of joint prayer refers to Church sacraments which present meetings with living Christ. It could be said that this is manifested in Christ's transformation when the Jesus' disciples witnessed Christ glory and said: "It is good for us to be here" (Mark 9, 5).

If the creation of life refers to salvation (in many languages the terms health and salvation are synonyms, for example *salus*), and if illness and suffering question this meaning, we have to ask ourselves whether it is possible to discover the meaning in illness and suffering? Psychologist and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl states that "suffering creates fertile, even revolutionary tension and therefore, enables the men to feel what shouldn't be" (Frankl 1993, 153). Psychologist and theologian Mihaly Szentmartoni claims that, when a patient goes through an existential crisis "the most important are spiritual needs: finding meaning, forgiveness, hope and love" (Szentmartony 227). Medicines can temporarily remove discomfort and anxiety but, if there is no deeper creation of suffering and death, the anxiety can become unbearable. Since this is an act of faith and devotion to God as the only master of life and death, it is necessary to open your own inner person to transcendental reality which is described as life after death in Christian religion.

FOUNDATION

Apart from medical (doctors) and charitable (social) care, from the very beginning, the Church practices sacramental care of the patient. This is performed by priests who are trained in accordance with the Sacrament of Ordination and Church's mission. It has to be emphasized that all sacraments, as stated by Thomas Aquinas (STh, III, q. 60-65), can be understood as "treatments" or medicines acting primarily on spiritual level. However, they can also have a physical effect. The foundation of the sacramental practice can be found in Jesus's relation towards the sick and in the testimony on the sacramental activities of the Apostolic Church.

Jesus and the Sick: "Your faith has saved you"

Gospel testimony on Jesus clearly indicates that his actions towards the sick were compassionate and healing, and that the treatment (healing) includes salvation from the evil and forgiveness of sins. This proves that he was a doctor for body and soul, and that is a sign of salvation for a complete human being. On the other

hand, Jesus identifies with the sick ("I was sick and you looked after me"; Mtt 25, 36). The condition that Jesus sets, in order for the healing to work, is faith which has the saving power: "Your faith has healed you" (cf. Mark 5, 34-36; 9, 23). During his treatment, Jesus touches the ill and uses signs, saliva and laying of hands (cf. Mark 7, 32-36; 8, 22-25), mud and washing up (cf. John 9, 6). The ill try to touch him (cf. Lucas 6, 19). Although he did not heal all the sick, Jesus's healings were a sign of the vicinity of the Kingdom of Heaven and an announcement of the permanent healing: victory over evil, sin and death itself. Through his own suffering and death on the cross, he gave suffering a new salvation meaning and he gave each sufferer hope of defeating the suffering and death.

But how is it possible to get hope and succeed in the victory over the suffering and death? In accordance with the testimonies from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus sent his disciples to a preaching mission: "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mark 6, 12-13). In the same Gospel, it can be read that the resurrected Lord repeated this mission. The implementation itself shall be accompanied by signs: "By using my name... They will also heal sick people by placing their hands on them." (Mark 16, 17-18). This was recognized by the Church, not only as a special charisma (gift of healing), but also as a foundation for the sacrament of the care for the ill. Jesus' order: "Heal the sick!" (Mtt 10, 8) includes both physical and spiritual praying assistance which is to be especially practiced within the "Sacraments of Healing" (penance / reconciliation and anointment) and within the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Church practice: "The prayer of faith will heal him who is sick" (Jacob 5, 15)

At the very beginning of the Church activities, a special ceremony of praying for the sick was formed. It included anointing which is recognized as one of seven sacraments. In the Epistle of James, it is stated: "Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven." (James 5, 14-15). According to the James 5, 16, the prayer for physical healing is closely connected to the prayer for spiritual healing. This also refers to the Church sacramental prayer and prayer of suffrage (cf. Zovkić, 129-131). Pursuant to the above mentioned, Catholic Church dogmatically expressed its belief that this "holy anointment is founded as a true and real sacrament of the New Testament of the Christ, our Lord, the Gospel of Mark. It is recommended to the believers by James, Lord's apostle and brother." (Council of Trent, Second Council, 1695).

Liturgical tradition of the Eastern and Western Church has included the practice of anointment and holy oil consumption since the old times. Over the course of years, the focus was placed on anointment as the "Sacrament of the Dying". However, prayers for physical healing, comfort and help have never stopped. The aim was to achieve final salvation. Having this in mind, the claim made during the Second Vatican Council stating that the anointment "is not a sacrament just for those in life danger; the believers can take the anointment because of the illness or old age that precedes the life danger" (SC, 73) can be understood. Apart from the mentioned, the possibility of repeating the sacramental ceremony emphasizes the fact that the anointment can be received several times regardless whether it is because of a serious illness, deterioration of the patient's condition, dangerous surgical operation or old age. The sacrament can be received in the family home, hospital or in church (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum infirmorum, The Rite for anointing of the sick*, 9-13).

Since the sacraments are not just an expression of personal faith, but also meetings with the Christ in the mystery of the Church, it means that, if the acts of Church present *the Body of Christ*, they assume and include authentic ecclesial communion. It is well-known that human community helps and strengthens people in difficult situations such as illness and suffering. Therefore, sacraments have to be understood and celebrated in the communion of faith. This is especially expressed in the joint celebration of sacraments and in the fact that it presents one aspect of the "ecclesial care for the sick" which can be practiced in both church and hospital institutions (cf. Di Taranto, 266-267).

THERAPY

As the topic is sacramental care of the sick, many questions are automatically raised: Is it possible to experience the efficiency of the sacramental grace? Are the sacraments cures for psychophysical diseases? Do sacraments cure spiritual illness? Do they cure evil? What is the effect of the sacrament which is intended for others? How do sacraments affect human relations? What about healing charisma? What is its relation to sacraments? Can sacraments be connected to miraculous healings or these healings are only related to personal faith? (cf. Mateljan, Mala knjiga, 73). The Church answers all these practical questions not just from the anthropological point of view, but also from christological and ecclesiastic point of view. We have to interpret the presentation on the effects of the Sacrament of Anointment in accordance with these aspects. Two of these effects – *relief and spiritual strength* – are usually defined as primary effects. The other two – *forgiveness of sins and preparation for death* – are defined as secondary effects as they depend on person's spiritual and physical condition.

Relief and spiritual strength

The experience shows that everyone needs not just physical and body strength and relief, but also spiritual strength. *Catholic Church Catechism* states three different aspects of the graceful God's help which are manifested through the act of sacrament:

Special gift of the Holy Spirit

The basic grace of this sacrament is the grace of the support, peace and encouragement to overcome the obstacles in severe illness or disability caused by old age. This grace is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It restores self-confidence and faith in God, it strengthens and protects from the evil or discouragement and death related anxiety. God's support heals the soul and the body of the sick through the Holy Spirit if such healing is the will of God. What is more, 'if they have sinned, they will be forgiven' (James 5, 15) (CCC 1520).

Union with the Christ's passion

With this sacrament, the sick get strength and the gift to unify with the Christ's passion: the sick are, in a certain manner, blessed to bear fruit by unifying with the redeeming Christ's passion. Suffering, which is a consequence of the original sin, gets new meaning: it becomes a part of the Christ's saving acts (CCC 1521).

The grace of ecclesial communion

The sick who receive this sacrament are voluntarily 'unified with the Christ's passion and death, and in such manner, they contribute to the good within the God's people (LG 11). By celebrating this sacrament, the Church advocates the sick person's well-being at the Communion of Saints and, by receiving this sacrament, the sick person contributes to the sanctification of the Church and well-being of all people the Church suffers for and Christ sacrifices for (CCC 1522).

From the above mentioned, we can notice that the praying context of faith and reliance upon God, who manifested a way into new life through suffering and death in a person of Jesus Christ, is emphasized. From the eschatological aspect, the patient enters the ecclesial dynamic of cooperation, compassion and empathy of the community of the Body of Christ or the Church by sacramentally joining the Christ suffering. This dynamic is reciprocal: by praying and sacrificing, the Church advocates the sick. Psychologist and theologian Mijo Nikić simply interprets that "while healing illness, faith helps us by convincing us that we are not alone in our suffering and that there is someone who knows our suffering" (Nikić 2010, 354). The priest, as the one giving the sacrament, "should act positively and convince the patient, with his appearance and faith, that the God shall help him and give him the comfort he needs" (Nikić 2016, 211).

Union in faith is expressed through the prayers and acts of love. Since the prayer is an act of faith and union that includes everyone, especially the sufferers and the sick, and since the only method to measure the faith is

the effective love without which faith is useless (cf. James 2, 20), it is clear that we have to understand it in accordance with the spiritually and practically effective aspect. This is emphasized in the prayers connected to this sacrament when the patient is being anointed by the oil blessed by the bishop on the Holy Thursday or the priest directly before giving the sacrament. This prayer of blessing the oil has been kept since the ancient Church teaching times and it states: "*God of all consolation, you chose and sent your Son to heal the world. Graciously listen to our prayer of faith: send the power of the Holy Spirit, the Consoler, into this precious oil, this soothing ointment, this rich gift, this fruit of the earth. Bless this oil + and sanctify it for our use. Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul, and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever*". (The rite for anointing the sick, no. 75).

During the sacrament, the priest anoints the sick's forehead and hands with the blessed oil and says: "*Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. (Amen). May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up*". (The rite for anointing the sick, no. 76). After that, the prayer for the sick directly referring to the sacrament effects is recited: "*Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, by the grace of your Holy Spirit cure the weakness of your servant. Heal his/her sickness and forgive his/her sins; expel all afflictions of mind and body; mercifully restore him/her to full health, and enable him/her to resume his/her former duties, for you are Lord for ever and ever*". (The rite for anointing the sick, no. 77).

How efficient is the act of sacrament? How efficient is the prayer? French Nobel-winning doctor Alexis Carrel testifies about this by stating that "the doctor has the opportunity to observe psychophysiological and healing" effects of the prayer. Carrel says that the *psychophysiological effects*, along with strengthening the feeling for the sacred and chastity, are reflected in spiritual and organic transformation. He further adds that this effect can be compared to the activities of the internal secretion glands such as thyroid or adrenal gland. The prayer makes the sick capable of bearing the illness but it also brings inner peace. Therefore, "the doctor can be pleased if he sees that the patient started praying. Peace caused by the prayer is a great assistance in the therapy". Prayer *healing effects* have been confirmed many times. Carrel says that "*the prayer sometimes acts almost as an explosive*" which we consider a miraculous healing "characterised by very fast recovery process. Up to now, surgeons and physiologists have not seen such speed in their researches" (Carrell 37-47). Praying with faith can transform a person. It can lead the person into spiritual experience which is a state of transformation similar to the one apostles experienced on the Holy Mountain (Golub 272-278).

All of this does not mean that all people are directly conscious in their illness. Patricia Theiller says that "there is a religious dimension of the world which does not depend directly on the scientific knowledge" (Theiller, 34; cf. R. Pausch). Nevertheless, all who discovered this dimension say that they have found deeper foundations of their own existence through the suffering. Doctor Josip Kovač spoke in favour of the above mentioned when he suddenly went through a severe illness and surprising healing and recovery. During this experience, he discovered the most important values of life and Christian faith (Kovač, 401-405).

Forgiveness of sins and preparation for death

Within the Christian perspective of human life, death presents a deciding moment we have to prepare for. Death has positive meaning if it presents a transition to a "better life" and this is possible in the communion with the Christ, in joining his death and consequently, participating in his life – resurrection. In the sacramental sense, this communion starts by baptism (immersion into Christ's death and emersion into a new life; cf. Rome 6, 1-11). It is supported by other sacraments, especially Eucharist and it is finalized by anointment. Since every illness presents a type of prelude into the mystery of death, anointment has to be interpreted as a transition from this world to the other one. During the Middle Ages, this perspective was emphasized to a level that the sacrament itself was called the Sacrament of the Dying. Therefore, the *Catholic Church Catechism* states:

Preparation for the final transition

If the sacrament of anointment is given to anyone suffering from severe illness or weakness, there are more than enough reasons to give it to the ones that are about to leave this life (*'in exitu vitae constituti'*). Therefore, it was called *the sacrament of the dying (actually of the leaving – sacramentum exeuntium)*. The Sacrament of Anointment finalizes our adjustment to death and Christ resurrection that was initialized by the Sacrament of Baptism. It complements all the anointments that characterize a Christian life: baptism initiated a new life within us, confirmation gave us strength for the life battle, and this last anointment defends us at the end of our earthly life during last fights and just before entering the Lord's house" (CCC 1523).

The following prayer is suggested during the ceremony of the anointment of the sick at the end of the lifetime: "*Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature, to redeem all people, and to heal the sick. Look with compassion upon your servant, whom we have anointed in your name with this holy oil for the healing of his/her body and spirit. Support him/her with your power; comfort him/her with your protection, and give him/her the strength to fight against evil. Since you have given him/her a share in your own passion, help him/her to find hope in suffering, for you are Lord for ever and ever*". (The rite for anointing the sick, no. 77).

People do not usually like to think about death, and not to mention prepare for it. Still, they try to eliminate any thought of death as if it was something that does not belong to a human life. Emmanuelle Huisman-Perrin interprets this by a fact that illness brings fear and people run away from fear in different manners. However, there is no escape. It has to be faced, accepted as reality and we have to define ourselves in accordance with it. This does not mean standing in face of the death. Medicine often creates an illusion of life without death. "While trying to forget the death and defend themselves from its presence, people turned to medicine. Modern medicine evokes deeply hidden fantasy stating that death can be deceived" (Boban, 264). However, death cannot be tricked.

It makes sense to perform anointment just before death since it presents an effective sign of meeting the Christ in this decisive life situation. This was especially obvious in the last moments of St. John Paul II life (cf. Dziwisz, 40). It can be stated that the sacrament is consciously received as the "last anointment" when one accepts his own condition and prepares oneself for the transition. This is further analysed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her best-selling book *On Death and Dying*. She defines stages of relation towards death (anger, bargaining, depression and steady acceptance) and explains the transition from fear to accepting the Sacrament of Anointment, illness, prayer and sacramental help (cf. Saponi, 37-54).

The Sacrament of Anointment of the sick is given by a priest (bishop or presbyter). This is completely understandable since spiritual help is connected to the forgiveness of sins and since all three sacraments intended for the sick and performed by a priest are mutually related: penance (confession), anointment of the sick and Eucharist (communion). The priest is entrusted with the authority and he is given the mission to perform the sacramental forgiveness of sins (John 20, 22-23) which is realized not only within the sacrament of the penance and reconciliation, but also within the anointment of the sick (James 5, 15). It is assumed that those receiving the Sacrament of Anointment shall first receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession, if possible, and therefore receive God's forgiveness. Apart from the mentioned, it is suitable that the anointment is performed within the Eucharist ceremony with the community. On this occasion, it can be received by a greater number of patients or disabled. Therefore, the significance of a priest as a person giving anointment is closely related to sacramental reconciliation which includes not only God's forgiveness, but also "peace and serenity of the conscience and spiritual comfort" (DS 1704). "There shall be no peace for non-believers" says the Holy Scripture. Each sinner is non-believer. Sin imprisons the man, makes him unhappy, burdens him and connects to evil. Forgiveness of sins, especially in the sacrament which comes after honest repentance (even when it is not possible to confess all serious sins)

and in the moments of severe illness, brings peace to the soul which is about to leave this world. The significance and the responsibility of giving the sacraments can be seen at the example of St. Leopold Bogdan Mandić. Doctor Enrico Rubatelli in his book *Dio è medico e medicina* talks about "father Leopold's clinic" and states: "By understanding all troubles and miseries, he took them upon his shoulders in order to become the means of reconciliation between the people and the Heavenly Father, and, as Christ, he took upon himself all the suffering of bringing a man to the God" (Rubatelli, 70).

Finally, the final blessing of the anointment ceremony contains invocations which are reflected in the sacrament nature: "God the Father has blessed you. God the Son has healed you. God the Holy Spirit has enlightened you. God restored your health and granted you salvation. God filled your heart with peace and led you to eternal life." (The rite for anointing the sick, no. 77).

CONCLUSION

Christian claims on the therapeutic effects of anointment, and other sacraments, provide a theological and anthropological aspect of people, their identity and foundation of the human person in the Other. With its teaching and activities, the Church guides us to discover this foundation and to construct a thoughtful life through the effective faith in Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14, 6). Through the complete pastoral care of the patient, which includes physical, spiritual and sacramental care, the Church testifies and realizes its mission and the mission is to connect the people with the God through the Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This is called salvation using eschatological terminology. All believers are invited to take part in this, starting from the patient's family and the priest to pastoral associates and medical staff (cf. RBP, *Previous notes*, III, 32-37). All these forms of care have to start from the basic assumption which states that each person is worthy of respect, both during life and transition to eternity.

Taking into consideration everything mentioned above, it is clear why *the Catholic Church Catechism* recommends that priests and relatives encourage the sick to request the Sacrament of Anointment, to prepare for it with a suitable spiritual and religious mood and to have relatives and loved ones present when receiving the sacrament, especially if the sacrament is received in the family home (cf. CCC 1516). Having in mind that we end our earthly life by joining the Lord and that the Eucharist, as the sacrament of the dead and resurrected Lord Christ, is a pledge for an eternal life, Eucharistic communion, along with the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and sacrament of anointment, should be the last sacrament that the believer receives when stepping into the eternity. Eucharistic communion is a sacramental unification

with the Christ as a viaticum on the way to the blessed eternity which is supported by the words of Jesus: *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.* (John 6, 54). Therefore, it can be stated that, at the end of Christian life, "the sacraments of penance, anointment and Eucharist, as viaticum, make up the 'sacrament of preparation for eternity' or the sacrament of earthly pilgrimage finalization" (CCC 1525) and they guide us to our final meeting with the Lord, Jesus Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

At the very end, we can say that the therapeutic effects of the Sacrament of Anointment present graceful God's help to the sick or disabled by providing them with: (1) union with the Christ's passion for personal and Church benefit; (2) encouragement, strength and spiritual peace which helps the person bear the difficulties of the sick and old, even physical health if it is useful for salvation; (3) forgiveness of sins if the person could not get it during the Sacrament of Confession; (4) preparation for the transition to the eternity which is, in accordance with the Christian religion, the final aim of our earthly life.

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