

# JESUS CHRIST AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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## **Abstract:**

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted both the sacrifice of some to save human lives, but unfortunately also highlighted a cruel reality: selective medical treatment, argued by the fact that the medical staff was overwhelmed by the situation. The crises in Syria or Afghanistan have upset the international community, which has proved unprepared for the wave of refugees. Against the background of terrorism originating in these areas, the prejudices were those that marked some communities, making them unable to react to the need for security of refugees.

**Keywords:** *human rights, human nature, health care, coronavirus pandemic, terrorism, refugees, free will.*

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Over time, human history has recorded episodes of well-being, peace and balance, as well as episodes of conflict, skidding, abuse, and even the Holocaust. In order to prevent the occurrence or reappearance of such slips, at least on a theoretical level, mankind has understood that the human being was born free and should remain so, because: „disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

Man was created in the image and likeness of God, endowed with intellectual and spiritual gifts. Being created in the moral image of divinity, man had the power of choice, the freedom to think and act in accordance with moral imperatives. Man was created as a social being in order to have rela-

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1 United Nations of Human Rights: *Preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, available at [https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr\\_translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_translations/eng.pdf) (accessed on September 30, 2021).

tionships with others (Genesis 2:18 “It is not good for man to be alone”<sup>2</sup>). This means not only communication, but also the development of relationships of friendship, help, compassion, empathy, etc. Man was created to imitate God, because he was created like Him. Although he is human, not divine, man must reflect His Creator in his sphere: love, compassion, forgiveness or respect.

The fall into sin led to the corruption of the perfectly created man. Relationships between people have suffered, there have been abuses, lack of respect, compassion and empathy, some have become more equal than others. However, man’s fall into sin did not erase the two realities: man remained a social being, called to reflect God. These realities are very clear from the following articles in the Declaration of Human Rights<sup>3</sup>:

- ✦ Article I: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
- ✦ Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.
- ✦ Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.
- ✦ Article 25: 1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

In order to leave no doubt about the two realities, the divinity was actively involved in the history of mankind, the culminating point being Jesus Christ. In the 33 years spent on this earth, He has shown that man has remained a social being, called to reflect God. Here is how the Jewish historian, Joshephus Flavius, describes Him: “At that time Jesus lived, a wise man if he could be called aievea man. He was the author of amazing mira-

2 Dumitru Cornilescu’s translation of the Bible into Romanian.

3 United Nations of Human Rights: *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, available at [https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr\\_translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_translations/eng.pdf) (accessed on September 30, 2021).

cles and the teacher of people who were happy to know the truth. he drew a multitude of Jews, but also of the Gentiles. This was Christ. Even if Pitalus, due to the accusations brought by the leaders of our people, nailed him to the cross, those who loved him from the beginning did not stop loving him. For the third day was shown to them alive again, as the prophets sent by God foretold, performing a thousand other miracles. from then until today, the Christian people endure, who derive their name from him.”<sup>4</sup>

This article will present some of the actions of Christ through which He interacted with people, even through non-verbal language, to offer them compassion, empathy, respect, and health care, regardless of stage of illness or age.

### Healing the leper

An almost identical presentation of the event by the synoptics is observed (Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-44, Luke 5:12-14). At the leper's request, "If you want, you can cleanse me", all three evangelists presented the same image: Jesus reaches out to touch him and gives him the answer, "Yes, I want you to be cleansed!". Mark catches a detail: before touching him, Jesus I felt sorry for the leper. This detail is important because whenever the Gospels state that Jesus was shown mercy, immediately followed by a miracle performed either by the disciples (after He was shown mercy, Matthew 9:36, the disciples are sent to the scattered sheep of Israel, having the power to work miracles, Matthew 10:1), either directly by Christ (Matthew 14:14 – healing the sick; Matthew 15:32, Mark 6:34, 8:2 – the miracles of food multiplication; Matthew 20:34 – the healing of the blind in Jericho; Mark 5:19 - the healing of the demon in Gadara and Luke 7:13 – the resurrection of the son of the widow in Nain). Of all these, only on three occasions is it stated that they were accomplished by means of touches (the healing of the blind in Jericho).

Returning to the healing of the leper, it is noted that Jesus Christ touched this sick man, although the law clearly forbade this, urging the isolation of society from infected people (Leviticus 13:1-46; Numbers 5:1-4; 12:10.15; 2 Kings 7:3.8.10; 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:21; Luke 17:12.13).

Leprosy is considered to be a tropical disease due to the fact that it was first described in India in the 6th century BC, from where it spread

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4 Flavius Josephus, *Antichități iudaice* [Antiquities of the Jews], vol. II, translation and notes by Ion Acsan, București, Editura Hasefer, 2001, p. 446.

to southwest Asia and the Pacific islands. The Roman legions contributed to its spread, and later the Crusaders in Europe and the conquistadors in North America. Leprosy is an infectious disease with a chronic evolution, caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* or the *Hansen bacillus*, after the name of the one who discovered it in 1873. The disease is characterized by nervous manifestations, skin, lesions of the oral mucosa, upper respiratory mucosa, eye lesions, testicles and multiple bone lesions.<sup>5</sup>

The Hebrew term *sara'ath* used in Leviticus 13:14 was rendered in the LXX by leprosy, a word used exactly in the New Testament. However, researchers are not sure whether the biblical term *lepra* actually indicates Hansen's disease. Their insecurity stems from the observation that the disease mentioned in Leviticus 14:3 appears to be curable, while Hansen's disease is incurable. A number of authors tend to believe that Leviticus 14:3 does not refer to the Hansen bacillus, but to *Psoriasis vulgaris* (dry ringworm). This is a non-communicable condition that first affects the skin, then the abdomen, chest, back and rarely the scalp, face and hands. It is a curable disease that does not endanger life. In the same vein, the white leprosy of which the Old Testament speaks would be *psoriasis guttata*. In conclusion, they say, the Hebrew term *sara'ath* can be taken as a collective term that indicates several diseases, including *Elephantiasis* and *Psoriasis*. The evangelist Luke, a physician by profession, uses the Greek word *lepra* to indicate *psoriasis* (and they cite the healing of the leper in Luke 5:12.13), thus indicating the same disease as the Old Testament term.<sup>6</sup>

Speaking of leprosy, Josephus Flavius says that all those who had the symptoms of these conditions were isolated "so that they would have nothing to do with anyone." However, he notes that there is a possibility that someone will be cured of this disease. The disease was also present among non-Jews, these lepers not being excluded from society, and even being able to hold positions. He concludes by saying that the difference is only spiritual in nature. The information provided by Josephus practically confirms the opinion of those who believe that leprosy is a collective term that includes several diseases, some curable and that it all comes down to one aspect of a spiritual nature, through which God wanted to teach Israel to keep sin away from him.

5 Ludovic Păun, *Boli infecțioase tropicale* [Tropical Infectious Diseases], București, Editura Medicală, 1979, pp. 31-32.

6 *Dicționar biblic* [Biblical Dictionary], vol. II, translation by Constantin Moisa, București, Editura Stephanus, 1996, pp. 246-247.

The key to Jesus' touch of the leper is in his confidence in the Savior's power: "If you want, you can cleanse me." Although no one had been healed of leprosy since the days of the prophet Elisha, this man's faith in the healing power of Christ made him break all the rules that required him not to appear in public. The danger was all the greater, as the Lord was constantly surrounded by a great multitude of people, and there was, therefore, the possibility of mass contamination. But he understood that there was Someone above all disease, who could not be affected in any way. There is only one limit to the Savior's healing power, namely, His own will. "If you want to," the leper told him, and Jesus wanted to. Without any fear of contamination, Christ touches the leper and heals him. Surely it would have been enough to say just a few words and he would have been healed, as was the case with the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:12-14). But His touch gives the sick person a double certainty: first, that Jesus cares for him entirely, and second, that He is stronger than the contagious disease.<sup>7</sup>

If leprosy refers to Hansen's disease, one thing is clear: Christ's gesture expresses the certainty of healing and not the violation of the law that forbade approaching a leper. Even though Jesus was greater than the Law, He had come to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17.18). If leprosy does not refer to the Hansen bacillus, but to a milder, non-communicable disease, Jesus' gesture is one of encouraging the faith of the leper who overcame all barriers to reach the One who has power over the disease. The cure for leprosy also shows that everyone, regardless of the disease they suffer from, has the right to life and health care.

### **Healing Peter's mother-in-law**

Unlike the healing of the leper, in the case of Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8: 14-17; Mark 1: 29-31; Luke 4: 38.39), every evangelist brings something: Luke says that Jesus went upon her, Matthew tells us that he touched her hand, and Mark tells us that he grabbed her hand and lifted her to her feet, then the colds left her. Of all, only Luke states that Jesus also used verbal language, when he rebuked the colds, while Matthew and Mark suggest that Christ used only non-verbal language.

If we look at the accounts of the three evangelists as a progressive description of a broad movement, we will see that there is no contradiction

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7 Gerhard Maier, *Evangelia după Luca* [The Gospel of Luke], Korntal, Editura Lumina lumii, 1999, p. 203.

between them, but they complement each other. Probably Peter, in whose house the Lord Jesus Christ had entered, told him about his mother-in-law's suffering, and Jesus came to the sick woman's bed, leaned over her, stretched out her hand to her, took her by the hand, and lifted her to her feet.

The Hebrew term *qaddahath*, "burning heat" (Deuteronomy 28:22) and the Greek term *pyretos*, "suffocating heat, fever (great)"<sup>8</sup> (Luke 4:38; John 4:52; Acts 28:8) are terms that suffer from the presence of a high temper. Unlike Matthew and Mark who say that this woman had a fever (colds), doctor Luke captures the patient's condition much better, as he has "high colds", distinguishing between different degrees of fever.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the disease had reached a rather dangerous stage and only His intervention could solve the situation. The non-verbal language used by the Savior to heal this woman is suggestive. Master in consolation, He first bends down to the sick man's bed to make eye contact with him, touches him as if to alleviate his suffering by comforting him, and then takes him by the hand and lifts him to his feet healed.

The Greek term *egeiren* (*raising her to her feet*)<sup>10</sup>, means "to get up, to wake up (from sleep); to wake up from the sleep of death, to rise".<sup>11</sup> Cornilescu tried to better capture the meaning of the term, this *awakening* (*from sleep*) involving a standing up. It's like saying "in a few seconds he was standing". On the other hand, *egeiren* shows the severity of the disease, Peter's mother-in-law being dying, and Jesus woke her from this lethargy.

Commenting on this respect for standing up, Gerhard Maier says: "Lifting it means a symbolic action. It must be clear: *I, Jesus, am now giving you health*".<sup>12</sup> But if we connect with what followed this action (the fact that she began to serve them), it leads us to think that this woman was used to doing this, to serve, only that the disease robbed her of this possibility. When Christ, the One who knew the woman's need, took her by the hand

8 Daniel Bărnăuț / Emeric Hubert / Jozsef Kovacs, *Dicționar grec-român pentru studiul cuvintelor Noului Testament* [Greek-Romanian Dictionary for the Study of the Words of the New Testament], Arad, Editura Teologos, 1999, p. 179.

9 J. D. Douglas (eds.), *Dicționar biblic* [New Bible Dictionary], Oradea, Editura Cartea Creștină, 1995, p. 1162.

10 Dumitru Cornilescu's translation of the Bible into Romanian.

11 Daniel Bărnăuț / Emeric Hubert / Jozsef Kovacs, *Dicționar grec-român pentru studiul cuvintelor Noului Testament* [Greek-Romanian Dictionary for the Study of the Words of the New Testament], p. 55.

12 Gerhard Maier, *Evanghelia după Marcu* [The Gospel of Mark], Korntal, Editura Lumina lumii, 1999, p. 60.

and lifted her to her feet, He wanted to communicate that he was restoring her position of service.

Lenski points out that the Greek term *diakonei* suggests that the woman and her daughter helped serve the evening meal to the guests (Jesus, James, and John; see Mark 1:29)<sup>13</sup>, because here the term *diakonei* has a concrete meaning of service. that is, cooking, serving, feasting and other household activities.<sup>14</sup> In the New Testament, the original meaning of the term *diakoneia* is to “wait at the table” (Luke 17: 8; John 12: 2), in the sense of “supervising the supper” (Mark 1:31; Luke 10:40; Acts 6: 2). But the term also has other meanings: “to be useful, to leap” (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:3); a gift of the church (1 Peter 4:10).<sup>15</sup> In Greek, the tense verb *diakonei* used by the three evangelists (Matthew 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39) points to a long, continuous action that began before the present tense, suggesting that the woman she had served before the disease made her helpless, and she continued to serve even after she was healed.

In conclusion, the significance of this passage is that not even the most difficult stage of an illness can stand against Christ in order to restore to Peter’s mother-in-law the service of deaconess. Also, in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, this episode conveys the idea that everyone, regardless of age, has the right to life and health care.

## Healing on the Sabbath

These events, two in number, are related by the evangelist Luke, namely the healing of the hunchbacked woman (Luke 13:11-13) and of the sickle dropper (Luke 14:2-4).

In medicine, the condition that the woman seems to suffer from is called *spondylitis deformans*, a kind of deviation of the spine.<sup>16</sup> The Greek term *hydropikos* refers to dropsy or hydropsy, a disease characterized by the accumulation of fluid in the body’s natural cavities or tissues. It is a symptom of heart, liver, lung or kidney disease. It is possible that King Asa’s illness was a form of dropsy (2 Chronicles 16:12).<sup>17</sup>

13 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1964, p. 88.

14 Gerhard Maier, *Evanghelia după Luca* [The Gospel of Luke], p. 188

15 Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. II, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1993, pp. 84-87.

16 Gerhard Maier, *Evanghelia după Luca* [The Gospel of Luke], p. 598.

17 *Dicționar biblic* [Biblical Dictionary], vol. I, translate by Constantin Moisa, București, Editura Stephanus, 1995, p. 177.

Commenting on the passage in Luke 13:11-13, Lenski observes that although doctor Luke first records the words of Jesus and then the touch, yet the words and the touch go together, there being no time interval between the two events. They were separated by commentators for strange reasons. One reason is that a woman should not attribute magical power to the hands of Jesus. But then, he wonders, why did Christ use his hands again? It was obvious that he didn't need to touch her. Another reason is that when the woman heard the word of Jesus, she did not have the courage to get up until only after the Savior had laid his hands on her. But, says Lenski, the laying on of hands is always only symbolic and represents, like the words of Jesus, the expression of divine mercy.<sup>18</sup>

We believe that the two cases of laying hands on the sick are closely related to the fact that they take place on the Sabbath. Jesus, in a short time, wants to teach his fellow men. In order to keep the Sabbath as accurate as possible, the Jewish scholars instituted a series of laws that forbade the carrying out of a list of works. "In addition, to prevent any violation, even from disregarding the Sabbath, scholars have instituted additional laws, which serve as walls for the defense of the Torah. Here are four examples of this: (1) *Ghezerot* (*decrees*): close to dusk, on the eve of the Sabbath, the tailor, for example, must be careful not to leave the house with a needle stuck in his lapel, as it would mean breaking the ban on carrying an object (Sab. 1,3). (2) *Mukṭe* (*set aside*): objects that must not be touched, as their use could lead to a prohibited action. (3) *Noland* (*born*): new things that appear, such as eggs made on the Sabbath, cannot be used on this day. (4) *Švut*: any action that does not fall to be done on the holy day; for example, climbing a tree (Stick 5.2)."<sup>19</sup>

The Jews believed that the disease was caused by a sin committed by a person and that God was to punish (Genesis 12:17; Proverbs 23:29-32), by a sin of his parents (2 Samuel. 12:15), or the deception of Satan (Matthew 9:34, Luke 13:16).<sup>20</sup>

18 R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1961, p. 736.

19 *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism* [The Encyclopedia of Judaism], translate by Vivane Prager, C. Litman, Țicu Goldstein, București, Editura Hasefer, 2000, pp. 755-756.

20 Merrill C. Tenney / James I. Packer / William White, *Viața cotidiană în vremurile biblice* [Daily Life in Bible Times], translate by Olimpiu S. Cosma, Făgăraș, Editura Agape, 1997, p. 93.



Erickson states in the same note that in the ancient world there was a belief that “the disease is either sent by the Godhead or caused by evil spirits. Even the people of Israel were influenced by these superstitions and came to wear amulets to remove the disease. Some of them also believed that sickness was a specific sign of divine disapproval, of the punishment that came from individual sin.”<sup>21</sup> Erickson goes on to say that it seems that the cause of the disease was the fall into sin. “Following the sin of Adam and Eve, many evils entered the world. Sickness was among the curses that God pronounced upon the people of Israel as a result of their iniquity (Deuteronomy 28:22). All creation has been subjected to bondage and futility through sin (Romans 8:20-23). While some biblical descriptions of the curse are lacking in specificity, it seems reasonable to attribute to this source all the troubles now found among men, including sickness or disease.”<sup>22</sup>

In conclusion, sickness was associated with sin, but more than that, touching a sick person, his clothes, or the place where he sat meant uncleanness (Leviticus 15: 7, 21-24,27).

Putting his hands on the two on the Sabbath, Christ rebuked his fellow men for the rigid character they gave to their day of rest. They cared for wealth on the Sabbath, laying their hands on their animals to water them (Luke 13:15), or to help them in case they were in trouble (Luke 14:5); they cared for the family on the Sabbath, laying their hands on their children in case they fell into a fountain, but they were not willing to lay their hands on their fellows who might need only comfort.

In order to keep the Sabbath as perfect as possible, the Jews created a system of protection around them to protect them from all that would mean touching sin. But they exaggerated in such a way that they avoided touching a sick person so as not to be filthy. Israel was an expert at keeping the letter of the Law, but it lost sight of its spirit. Putting his hands on the two sick on the Sabbath, Jesus Christ wants to teach them what human sensitivity means, which the Jews had lost sight of. He did not rebuke them because they had no healing power, but because they no longer even had the power to comfort those who were suffering beside them. Also, these healings send a strong message to all mankind to put prejudices aside when faced with human need.

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21 Millard J. Erickson, *Teologie creștină* [Christian Theology], vol. II, trad. Elena Jorj, Oradea, Editura Cartea Creștină, 1998, p. 425.

22 *Ibidem*.

## Conclusions

For three and a half years of service, Jesus Christ demonstrated the validity of the Declaration of Human Rights. His closeness to the sick, but especially their touch, showed the validity of the expression “I have dug thee into my hands” (Isaiah 49:16). Jesus’ hands knew all the needs of those He touched, and He wanted to meet those needs. Christ also tried to teach his fellow men to be more sensitive to those around them, trying to remove all those barriers that man had created to man.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted both the sacrifice of some to save human lives, but unfortunately also highlighted a cruel reality: selective medical treatment, argued by the fact that the medical staff was overwhelmed by the situation. However, no man, regardless of his illness or severity, should be denied his rights to life and health care. No one, regardless of age, should be denied the right to life and health care.

The crises in Syria or Afghanistan have upset the international community, which has proved unprepared for the wave of refugees. Against the background of terrorism originating in these areas, the prejudices were those that marked some communities, making them unable to react to the need for security of refugees.

However, we must not forget that man was created as a social being, called to reflect God in order to offer compassion, empathy, respect and, why not, impartial medical care.

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