

Comparative study on the concepts of Healing, as described in the Lives of the Saints in Christian and Daoist traditions

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Abstract:

Despite total absence of any historical evidences showing the connection between Semitic and Chinese cultures, therefore between Christian and Daoist Traditions, one could easily trail some obvious conceptual parallels in the world perception by the believers as well as in ethics and morality of these two religious traditions. The ability of Healing is fundamental for the Saints both in Christian and Daoist traditions. The Saint here may be considered the direct successor of a shaman, which is typical for more primitive ancient religions, such as ancestor veneration or fetishism. As a connection point between gods, spirits and the human world, the Saint performs a function of a votarist for the casual, day-to-day side of the religion, and the main thing ordinary people need is the evidence of the healing powers.

The purpose of this research is to answer the question, whether there might exist similarities in semantic, cultural, ethic and structural elements in the concept of Healing by the Saints in the Lives of the Saints in Christian and Daoist traditions upon condition of the total absence of historical interactions between those religions? What might cause the discrepancies between them?

Key Words: Daoism; Christianity; healing; the Saint; exorcism

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I. Introduction

No historical facts show the connection between Daoist and Christian traditions in the course of their historical development. However, in terms of religious relationships as well as the questions of morality and ethics, they have quite much in common, that may be clearly witnessed by various episodes from the Lives of the Saints described in hagiographical literature sources.

In both of these traditions, the Saint in a certain way is a mediator between gods and humans, serving as new religious image of a shaman, who is typical for more primitive stages of religious development. As a link between gods and humans, the Saint serves as a helper for ordinary people, protecting them from evil and healing them.

One could observe the existence of some common principles in the ways of healing by the Saints in Christian and Daoist traditions. For example, in such rituals and cultural beliefs as healing by prayers, material objects, water, believing in the healing power of the Holy relics, etc. As far as we intend to focus not on magical, but on religious side of those, we now will specify physical and spiritual types of healing as the central objects for our comparison. These two types of healing are common in any religion. While in Christianity the human being is of dual nature, that means clearly dividing it into spirit and body detached from each other, in Daoism spirit and body are closely connected with each other and generally cannot be separated. However, here one may also observe both physical and spiritual types of healing, where the latter is used due to the evil spirits that worm into a human causing either physical illnesses or mental obsessions.

These kinds of explanations for any illness in Daoist and Christian traditions go back to the ancient history being a part of the archaic worldview. They are based on the mythological representation of an illness as an unknown extraneous power, external influence causing damage to health, while the last is a natural and "correct" state for a human being. Such representation is typical for all archaic cultures, reflecting their fundamental principle of dividing the world into the *inside*, that is so close and well understood human world (*microcosm*), and *outside* world (*macrocosm*), that is filled with the powers a human being cannot control in their everyday life, those include the power of nature, gods, mythical creatures, dead ancestors, etc.

This world is full of danger and so hostile to the small world of a single human being. In order to counter the aggression of its inhabitants, to avoid droughts and cattle plagues, to have heavy crops and good

hunts and fishing, to protect oneself against illnesses and any other misfortunes, this human being must constantly perform various rituals, generally aiming to support (and recover, if needed) this fragile balance and “peaceful coexistence” of *microcosm* and *macrocosm*. This purpose determines the need of such ceremonies as elaborate mortuary rites, sacrifices to gods, spirits of nature, and the dead, various seasonal feasts and celebrations. Those used to be the essential part of everyday life for people in a traditional agricultural society that exactly were Chinese and Semitic nations since the earliest times.

Due to political system modification and development of religious thought, later Christianity succeeded to replace pagan deities, but it was not that easy to replace the usual image of the world, the way of thinking and, consequently, the way of behavior of ordinary people. Most of the population of Medieval Europe consisted of those same farmers, uneducated simple souls following traditional ways of life from generation to generation, because “*their fathers did it that way*”.

A fatal coincidence in human life could now be explained by the will of Divine Providence, causing any illness, while strong belief in absolute and unquestionable divine justice left no doubt in its rightness and reasonability. This was the way of accepting one’s illnesses the Church taught its members.

Healing was that most important, desired and required ability for Saint Wonderworkers in the eyes of their believers. The cult of the Saints as patrons and protectors, that are always there to help, derived from the mass irresistible need for a miracle, and miraculous healing was one of such. A Saint with the reputation of a healer is the most attractive for ordinary people. It was the main reason why the cult of the Saints became so incredibly popular in China in the beginning of the Common Era and in the Christian world in Early Middle Ages.

In Christian cult of the Saints, a miracle itself was never considered all-sufficient, being no more than an evidence of divine grace and holiness of the wonderworker. It correlates with Daoist stories, in which a miracle performed by a Daoist serves as a proof of those special abilities or higher levels of spiritual and physical practices that he has mastered.

Healing served as the most socially important miracle for both of these religions, evidences of such make up the main part of the Lives of the Saints that is not less than 60% of the whole amount of miracles. Starting from the 12-13th centuries, among Christian prayers and rituals there appear first universal blessing lines for “*curing any illness*”. Since the 14th century, Mary Magdalene healing balm and other remedies of this kind became objects of a lively trade in churchyards before a Mass. They could be used not only as a cure-all, but also for neutralization of poisons and witchcraft, for laying demons and frightening away ghosts. Such healing potions, often made of mystical or quite controversial ingredients, as well had been the main way of medical treatment used by Daoist healers long before anything of this kind appeared in Christianity.

The fact of succession of traditions and ideas after the cult of the dead is obvious in the context of Chinese syncretistic religions. However, many scientists as well consider Christian cult of the Saints direct successor of the cult of the dead. It is true, that worshipping Saints has much in common with veneration of the dead and fetishism. Not only the relics of the Saints, but also their personal belongings, the tomb itself, even the dust from over this tomb, i.e. anything that in some way came in contact with them, becomes the object of worship. A wrap, which once lay on the sacred tomb, receives miraculous powers, while a cup, which once was used by the Saint, is now capable of recovering health of one in need. Relicts of pagan cult of the dead had been remaining key elements of traditional healing practices for a very long period of time.

While Daoist tradition followers considered health to be the result of one’s own training and magical practices, people in Christian tradition admitted that health and recovery are the God’s gift, which may be lost. However, their rituals, aiming at getting back health, that by official ideology was to be granted solely by the will of God, were actually far from religious in modern sense (i.e. performed to please the Heaven, pray for healing), but rather magical. These actions were supposed to have immediate, “*automatic*” result, as magic is a direct way to change the world with the use of special symbols, words or objects with specific (symbolic) functions. Of course, no such contradictions exist in Daoist tradition, partially due to the concept of knowledge continuity and the unity of religious and magical origins. In Christian tradition, magic has been officially banned, but in ordinary people beliefs, in one way or another it leaked into and merged with Christianity in its common understanding. This fact by no means lessens the emotional power of people’s faith or contradicts with their religious beliefs, because magic, being communicative by its nature, has not to deal with mind as much as it has to deal with behavior. All the specific ritual symbols in the process of healing by a Saint as well as the effectiveness of the ritual itself are explained by the practitioner based on Christian religious principles, while their inner meaning is based on archaic, initial layers of people’s collective mind.

Despite relatively well-developed medical system and stable political and economic system both in Chinese society during the period of prosperity of Daoism and in Christian society, the life of a human being that time had to face many various dangers. Physicians were rare and out of reach for most of the common population, while healthcare level in its modern sense stayed extremely low. That made the Saint a *refugium pauperum*, “*a refuge for the poor*” (this is how St. Anno was called by the anonymous author of his Lives) not

only in terms of social position, but also as a place for people in need, in desperation, having nothing but to set their last hope on this ritual of miraculous intervention.

Healing of physical illnesses

In contrast with Christian Saints, many Daoists were also physicians, such as Li Tieguai, Sun Simiao, Zhang Boduan, etc. Thus, Daoist practices of treatment may be considered relevant from medical and scientific points of view, at least in relation to the period of Daoist tradition evolution and development.

“[He Gong, a Daoist] knew a thing or two in healing art, he often gave treatment to people” [1]; “[A well-known ancient Daoist] himself said he’s come from Hejian. His food were cascarilla tree seeds, he used to sell universal remedies in the market” [2]; “[Li Changzai, a Daoist healer] healed up in three days, minor illnesses in one day” [2]; “[Chen Jian] could heal both severe and mild diseases, hundreds of people worshipped him.” [3]

One of the basic treatment methods in Daoist tradition is taking specific plants and elixirs with healing effects. “[Feng Gang, a Daoist] came from Yuyang. He collected different herbs and flower heads. Started to use them in the first month of the year and stopped in the ninth, kept them for a hundred of days, fried them in nine fires. As he met a dying man, he used to put herbs into their mouth, and in the next moment the man would come back to life. He himself took those herbs and has not aged a day even after many hundreds of years.” [3]

Since ancient times, Daoists have been prioritizing health-improving practices, medicinal herbs and potions for healing, as shown in a quote below.

“Someone asked, “Is it possible for a person, following Dao, to never feel sick?” Baopuzi [a great Daoist philosopher] said, “The main principle of diligently cultivating one’s life is to take spiritually strong medicine. One must also regularly train their *pneuma* circulation, practise Daoyin exercises twice a day to activate their *rong* and *wei* energy and keep it from stagnation. On condition of applying the art of the Bedchamber, regulating the amount of consumed food and drinks, if as well avoid being affected by wind and wetness and suffering from the inevitable, then no illnesses will happen.” [4]

Daoist historical records include stories, in which the Saints gave medicine to ordinary people. This medicine not only cured them from illness, but also prolonged their life and youth.

“[Zhao Qu, an ancient Daoist] Qu got severely ill and was going to die. He worried, that his family would be infected, so he asked them to lead him into the mountains. His family members prepared enough corn for him to survive for a year, led him into the mountains and built a fence around his hut, being afraid that tigers, wolves, and other wild animals would attack him. It was very difficult and painful for him to live there alone, he was suffering and crying all day long, and so more than hundred days had passed. One night he saw three persons in front of his hut. They asked him, who he is. He realized that someone happening to appear in such a dark forest in the mountains could not be human, so those should be no other than spirits. They passed through the fence as if it was no obstacle for them. They asked Zhao Qu, “If you want to be cured, you should take medicine, will you?” He answered, “...I’m going to die soon, but if there is a medicine, why not try?” They said, “This medicine contains pine nuts and various conifers, they will not only cure your illness, but also prolong your life. Eat half of what we gave you, and the illness will go away. After that continue eating it.” Zhao Qu spent three hundred years alive, looking even younger each time others met him. After that he went into the mountains, and no one saw him since then.” [3]

Meanwhile Christians, who considered healing to be granted by divine will, used to prioritize prayer, asking God to heal them. It was also due to poor development of medical treatment in Medieval Europe and suppressing folk-medicine as related to heresy and sorcery. That was the reason why the Church rejected traditional medicine and persecuted pagans and sorcerers. Thus, in Christian canonical scriptures and the Lives of the Saints we do not observe any usage of medicinal herbs and potions. What is more, this fact is directly connected to one of the main Christian doctrines, saying that immortality is only the immortality of the soul, while Daoist tradition admits and aims at the immortality in flesh.

Since in Christian tradition healing may be granted only by God, another widespread concept here is Faith Healing. Faith healing in Christianity is a doctrine establishing the possibility of supernatural physical healing from a disease or congenital (gained) physical defect. This doctrine is recognized in one way or another by most of Christian denominations. To be healed by faith, one needs to pray, believe in the possibility of a miracle, sometimes also some other specific rituals. Even nowadays faith healing in many cases is followed by refusal of medical treatment.

Various spells, i.e. prayers and **words of healing** gained their popularity both in Christian and Daoist traditions. For example, Gregory of Nyssa, an ancient chronicler, in his works writes about Gregory the Miracle-Worker healing a crowd with words.

“At first there were only a few people listening to him; but by the end of the day, by the sun set, so many had joined the first company, that the amount of believers was enough to make a crowd. In the morning people appeared in front of the door again, together with their wives, children, old men, and those affected by

demons or any other illness. Staying in the middle, he, by the power of the Holy Spirit, granted to each of them what they needed: he preached, explained, convinced, taught, healed.” [9]

The process of the ritual is described in the Epistle of Jacob. “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of Messiah’s community, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” [10]

Long before the establishment of religious Daoism in the 3rd century AD, Sunzi, a Confucian philosopher, explained the nature of a prayer and its divinity. “[Questioner]: When someone offers prayers for the rain and it starts, what does it mean? The answer is it means nothing. It means as much as the rain that no one asked for [in prayers]. In case of a Solar or Lunar eclipse people are trying to hide from them; in case of a drought they pray for the rain, they make decisions only after fortunetelling. It does not mean that asking [offering prayers or telling fortunes] will give them what they want. Those are no more than decorations [of the ruler’s doings]. Thus, while a perfect human being sees it as a decoration, for ordinary people its meaning is divine. As a decoration, it brings happiness; but when divinized, it is [leading] only to misfortunes!” [5]

In the following Daoist quote we also observe some kind of depreciation of a prayer in favour of healing remedies. “This time as Lan-Xiang [a Daoist deity] descended to Shi, he asked her, “What prayer should I offer to summon you for help?” “A prayer of casting out demons to recover from illnesses,” she answered, “but those lustful prayers will be of no use. I, Xiang, eliminate demons using potions.” [6]

What concerns Christianity, words here possess very special meaning. It may be observed from the first lines of the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word...” [11] Thus, a prayer here is of primary importance as it has been the strongest healing power since the times of the Bible.

“And the prayer of faith will heal him who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The insistent prayer of a righteous person is powerfully effective.” [10] “[Jesus Christ] sent the Word of His and healed them, and released them from their graves.” [12] “[Jesus Christ] He was going into a village when he was met by ten men suffering from a dreaded skin disease. They stood at a distance and shouted, “Jesus! Master! Have pity on us!” Jesus saw them and said to them, “Go and let the priests examine you.” On the way they were made clean. When one of them saw that he was healed, he came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself to the ground at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan.” [13]

Ge Hong seems to be quite skeptical about prayers and sacrifices, pointing out the importance of morality. “It is not enough to offer prayers respectfully to become happy, it is not possible to avoid misfortune worshipping gods and making sacrifices. If fate could be changed and life could be prolonged by means of prayers, if illnesses could be healed by means of sacrifices, then all the rich would definitely enjoy their perfectly long life, and lords would never suffer from illnesses and diseases. But spirits do not appreciate those not belonging to their kin, while demons are not tempted by obscene worship. Since humankind itself is divided into honourable and unworthy, standing on opposite ends from each other, then gods are standing even farther from all humans. They are clean and elevated, their morality is unlike that of humankind, they are all noble and respectable. Isn’t it obvious that those gods will not come over to take your wine gifts, smelling like a dead rat for them, and they will not condescend to these mortals after bows and kneeling of some insignificant beings. Lack of sonly respect and devotion to the superior are terrible sins that will never be forgiven by a wise ruler, not even for a sacrifice of a thousand gold pieces or a great feast, offered by the family or neighbours of the sinner. As this is what happens among humans, it is even more difficult to gain the gift of longevity or healing from illnesses in such a way. Such gifts may not be granted simply as mercy for evil, they are very much more.” [4] This saying serves as proof of the syncretic character of Chinese religious and philosophical thought, as the author underlines the importance of sonly respect that is one of the essential principles of behavior in Confucianism.

A number of healing miracles happened after **making a vow**, which means that the diseased themselves or their family gave a promise to God (or to the Saints) to do something in case of recovery from illness. It somehow resembles a sacrifice made after reaching the requested result. According to Christian tradition, respected Christian Saints after the end of the life receive an absolute ability to have influence on the lives of the living due to the God’s Grace inside them. Their prayers of us “please the Lord, as his most devoted servants,” [21] they are not dead, but living, same as “he is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive.” [13]

For example, a merchant’s son Joannes Startsev had been suffering from the falling evil since he was 14. Fits tortured him from day to day. He had been under medical treatment in St. Petersburg for 1 year and 9 months, but received no effect. Whatever physicians did was in vain. Thus, being aware of the possibility of miraculous prayer healing, the diseased himself started praying to St. Sergius and St. Herman of Valaam (great Christian Saints). He gave a promise to come and work in the monastery, if he succeeds in recovery. Soon after such prayers the recovery followed. In 1850 Joannes, having completely recovered, came to Valaam and spent a

year working hard to keep his promise. From medical point of view, this act of miraculous healing may be explained only in case of a functional disease. However, Russian physicians of that time have already been skillful enough in the aspect of fits of nerves and must have recognized his epilepsy. At any rate, all the speculations on the topic cannot now be more than purely theoretical, as no repeated diagnostics is possible due to obvious reasons [22].

Nikita the Wonderworker (a Christian Saint) led a dissolute life in his youth. However, upon entering a church on a certain occasion he heard the words of the Prophet that made him repent and promise that from that moment on his life would be righteous. He has been living in a monastery in deprivation and led ascetic life until the end of his days. According to his Life record, for his self-sacrifice and repentance God gave Nikita the gift of miracle working. The water spring of St. Nikita is situated not far from the monastery, it was dug by Nikita himself and is considered to be sacred and possess the ability to cure various illnesses [8].

Laying on of Hands is another healing practice, in which the Saint reduces the pain or cures the illness by physical touch. Such method is typical for many religious traditions, including Christianity and Daoism.

We may observe a plenty of examples of such healing practice in the Bible. "And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed." [14] "And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" [13] "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." [15]

Numerous cases of healing by such a method may be found in Daoist tradition as well. For example, Li Ah (an ancient Daoist) has once healed himself by laying on of hands. "Once, Li Ah was on his way back to Chengdu. On the road he saw a carriage riding at full speed. Li Ah placed his foot beneath its wheel, the carriage ran over his foot, so that the bones were broken, and the injury was very serious. Li Ah fell on the ground, he then put his arms around his foot, and it got healed." [2]

Water has always held very specific religious meaning in all religious traditions. On the first place, water is essential for life, so it has always been associated with the concept of life, therefore with birth and rebirth, as well as physical and spiritual purification. "Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life." [16]

From the earliest times, healing practices have been connected with **water sources**. In Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe all religious ceremonies were performed by the sides of rivers and streams. Moreover, purifying properties of water caused a belief in its ability to heal and protect. It is widely stated that miraculous and healing properties are natural for water. Christian people of the Middle Ages have often placed talismans with holy water near the house to protect it from evil. They doused into holy water to cure any diseases, from blindness to arthritis. Pilgrims travelled great distances to perform ablution in water possessing healing powers.

Another popular practice was using water from springs being under the protection of the Saints. People in Christian tradition used to bathe children, which could not walk properly yet, in a water spring by the grave of St. Aldegonde. Water from a spring, which appeared due to a prayer of St. Alberic of Utrecht, could cure fever and asthma, while water from St. Reynofii's spring cured hydropsy, etc. They commonly used to drink water from sacred springs, sometimes it was sprinkled on the sick. People also used to take water dips thrice a year on Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany.

According to the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, blessing of waters is performed to fill the water with God's Blessing, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you." [17]

Initially, holy water was used in baptism, as a visible sign of the internal grace, delivered to the baptized. Later, water was blessed to acquire healing powers [23]. In Late Middle Ages, Christians popularized the tradition of blessing the water by the name of the Saint, dealing with the illness it was supposed to cure. Thus, St. Peter's holy water was assigned to cure fever, St. Pirmin's water dealt with plague, and St. Blaise's water could heal not only humans, but cattle as well [24].

Some cases of healing in Christian history are related to the water spring of St. Seraphim of Sarov (a great Christian Saint). "Once he saw a vision, and in that place a sacred spring appeared. But in the place, where stood the Pure Feet of the Most Holy Mother of God and where Her staff hit the earth to let a spring run high and get the healing power to commemorate future generations by digging a well, She promised to give its waters more Blessing of Hers, than once possessed the waters of the Pool of Bethesda of Jerusalem." [25] Those, who drank holy water from that spring, got healed from any illness, could recover from blindness and deafness,

those, who were bedridden, could stand and walk. All the cases of healing were thoroughly registered by the monks of the monastery, several volumes in total.

The concept of the holy water may be found in Daoist tradition as well.

“[Lord Fu Jiu, an ancient Daoist] ...gave sick people some medicine of purple color, all those, who took it, recovered. When a plague came, he cured thousands of people. They saw he is a perfect human, who’s reached Dao. He said he’s returning to the mountains to get some holy water for people. As soon as they see white water flowing, they should drink it. This way a number of people got healed. People built more than ten temples to honor him.” [2]

“[Cheng Chang] Many people offered him prayers and came to him, when got ill, they drank altarage water and all recovered.” [3]

However, in Daoist texts one may observe some examples, in which water is not used for healing, but is a source of illnesses and evil.

“[Liu Ping, a Daoist] One man had a wife, who have been ill for several years. Then Liu Ping made water in a spring near that man’s house to dry up. It dried up, and there was a water dragon, that also dried up and was no more.” [3]

In addition to the abovementioned healing practices, there is a plenty of others. One of the most widespread methods is **healing with objects**, belonging to the Saints. This concept is undoubtedly connected with the ideas of fetishism and cult of the dead, which put in the first place veneration of objects and empowering them with specific properties. Some historical examples of healing with objects, belonging to the Saints, are shown below.

Thus, Christian tradition appreciates the usage of relics with healing powers. In the 16th century Antonio Possevino, a Jesuit and a papal legate, who happened to visit Moscow, wrote a comment about Russia. “Sick people hardly ever took any medicines, except for vodka and also water with relics of a Saint dipped in.” [26]

“Rumors of great deeds of Nikita the Wonderworker [a Christian Saint] and of the grace-filled gifts of his reached the faraway Principality of Chernigov, where at that time the grand prince Michal of Chernigov was suffering heavily from general limb paralysis. As soon as he learnt about Venerable Nikita, he immediately made preparations and left for Pereslavl together with his boyar Theodore... As they reached the monastery, the boyar found the great man of faith in his pillar, wearing stone cap and iron chains, in endless prayers and self-cultivation. After listening attentively to the boyar’s story, Nikita gave him instructions and also his staff to be handled to the diseased prince, so that he could come to the convent himself. The boyar hurried up to his prince, and as soon as the prince received the staff from him, he immediately felt as if his strength returned. Leaning on the staff with no other help, to the amusement of all, he went to the convent himself to see Nikita. As the prince reached the monastery, he approached the Wonderworker in awe and expressed his gratitude for healing his illness. It was May 16, 1186.” [27]

“[Wang Yao, a Daoist] healed using nothing but a piece of cloth, could cure anything. He did not allow the ill person to eat and drink after treatment, and they recovered.” [2]

“In the Eastern wing of this monastery there is a bronze hinny. Every month on 1st, 2nd, 15th and 16th days all those, who come here for morning market or for praying, touch or lay their hand over those parts of his body, in which they have a disease, they believe that they may ease the pain through this touch. In this monastery live Daoists, and there is a plenty of stone monuments here with inscriptions for various occasions.” [28]

One cannot but mention some cases of **distant** healing by the Saints, which is another common feature of a shaman, a sorcerer, inherited by the Saints.

“Huang Liuzi [a Daoist], whose surname was Ge Mingyue, staying a long way from a sick man, could cure him without a single look.” [3]

“As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die. Jesus asked, “Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?” The official pleaded, “Lord, please come now before my little boy dies.” Then Jesus told him, “Go back home. Your son will live!” And the man believed what Jesus said and started home. While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, “Yesterday afternoon at one o’clock his fever suddenly disappeared!” Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” And he and his entire household believed in Jesus.” [18]

Spiritual Healing

One of the main functions of religion is protecting and saving a human from evil. From the earliest times, polytheistic religions dealt with sorcery, which generally focused on exorcism. Sorcery and the cult itself are apparently lying in the hands of churchmen. However, ordinary people, being convinced in the danger coming from spirits, also struggle to carry them away every day and night. People continue this fight, being guided by the strategy, which was worked out by thousands of unknown intellectuals prone to sophistic philosophy, and tactics, which was considered by their ancestors to be useful and effective. There is a plenty of evidences of such. At all times this fight had its leaders that were villains, magicians, and priests, mastering sorcery art or other exquisite mystic practices, which let them not only protect from supernatural powers, but also cast them away. Those practices, aiming at blocking evil spirits, casting them away or even killing them, were either inherited from ancestors or worked out by themselves.

In China, spirits were the ones to blame for any illnesses or plagues, so casting them away was one of the essential elements of healing art. In the course of history this art have been developing in different ways and forms, but even nowadays this spiritual component is of considerable importance in its methods. That is why Sun Buer (a legendary Daoist woman) was highly honored for her ability to cast away evil spirits. “Ge Suan [a famous ancient Daoist] mastered the art of healing and also the art of killing and transformation monsters, he was able to cast the demon away or kill him.” [3]

Chinese medicinal and exorcist practices are closely connected with each other, especially when it concerns “demonic” cases as they are considered by Chinese medical science. “Chinese healers use fire, ash and fireflies to cast away demons; “raw material” for those are peach tree, tiger or cock meat, etc. Chinese tradition empowers these objects and creatures with healing properties, because in accordance with Chinese beliefs, they represent positive energy *yang*, i.e. contain the elements of cosmic divinity *shen*, giving supernatural powers to gods, as opposed to *gui* in general world order, i.e. the spirits using negative energy *ying*.” [7]

In Christian tradition, ancient ritual of exorcism of pagans was performed together with their baptism. In Early Middle Ages, the ability to exorcise demons was considered to be a special gift. Later, in the middle of the 3rd century, the position of an exorcist was officially introduced by the Church. There are two main points of view on those obsessed by demons in Christian tradition. From one side, they are considered to be “infected” with this illness because of their weakness. On the other side, they are sinners, who got this punishment for their sins. However, in case of a successful ritual of exorcism, obsessed person often cannot remember what has happened to them or strongly repents their sins. From this position, exorcism represents an act of spiritual healing.

“In was thus that we recently saw Abba Andronicus cured, as well as many others. For the enemy will revile the one whom he is besieging all the more when he sees him cut off from the heavenly medicine, and the more he thinks he is removed from the spiritual remedy the more fearfully and frequently he will make trial of him.” [29] This example explains that the more a person deviates from leading righteous life, the more they will suffer from demons, which have invaded their body and mind.

It is interesting to note that one common way both to follow a spiritual path to divinity and to exorcise demons is to lead a righteous life, that means two phenomena with completely different nature and problems have one general solution. Simplicity and multipurposeness of solutions for any possible problems is a good way to make a religion easily acceptable for ordinary people.

In the Middle Ages, Christian world used to persecute pagans and those who believed in folklore about demons, possessing women, and witches who sent spells on cattle and people. In those times, exorcism was quite a widespread ritual performed nearly over any person to see whether he is righteous or not. In the 13th century, Catholic Church also persecuted witches and heresy. This opposition shed light on the connection between humans and demons. Thus, exorcism in Christian tradition gained deeper meaning and second birth.

What concerns Russian Orthodox Church, the earliest hagiographic note about exorcism may be found in Kievan Cave patericon (14th century). The ability to heal people possessed by demons is represented to the readers as a normal state of things for a monk, so that it does not even need to be explained. “And for his ascetic life the God granted Lavrenty with healing powers. And one man from Kiev possessed by demons was brought to him, but the hermit could not cast the demon away from him, as the demon was too fierce.” [30]

In the Life of the Archpriest Avvakum there is an episode about himself exorcising a demon from his brother Yefimy with the help of prayers from a breviary. “And, weeping, I sent to the church, for the breviary and holy water, my spiritual son Symeon... Symeon wept over his friend, went to the church and brought back the book and the holy water. I started to recite over the bedevilled youth the prayers of Basil the Great...” [30] Thus, we assume that priests in the 13th century have already been considering bedeviled people as a certain category of parishioners, while in Russia healing of those possessed with demons have already been in practice in the 17th century.

Some cases of exorcism by different Saints are even mentioned in the Old Testament. However, New Testament contains much more mentions of such rituals. It is no surprise that exorcism performed by Jesus

Christ himself is especially noteworthy. “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.” [19]

The ritual of casting demons away, as well as physical healing practices in Christian tradition, was usually performed by means of prayers. “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.””[14] “Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.” [15]

Exorcising demons from people is one of both posthumous and lifetime miracles of the Saints. In both cases, the description of the ritual of exorcising demons is not much different in relation to other stories with healing cases. Similar to any other healing by means of prayers of the Saint, i.e. posthumously, exorcising demons usually requires presence of the “sick” near the tomb or in the Saint’s place of residence, in many cases healing becomes possible only after a prayer service ordered by the requestor and sprinkling them with holy water.

In this context, diabolism was obviously considered in the same way as an ordinary disease and cured in exactly the same way. As described in the Life of Sabbas of Storozhi, “The Saint passed away in great age on December 3, 1406. In the letter missive of the year 1539 Venerable Sabbas is called a wonderworker. In the middle of the 16th century, a record of his miracles was made. Sick people got healed with his relics, and demons were cast away from the possessed. Several times Venerable Sabbas of Storozhi appeared before the eyes of convent inhabitants, who prayed to ask him for help.” [32]

What concerns Daoist tradition, as opposed to Christianity, the Saints inclined to prioritize talismans for exorcism and protection from evil powers over prayers or spells.

Chapter 17 of Baopuzi describes the art of ascetic life and various methods to protect oneself from evil spirits of the mountains that are always ready to attack an unlucky anchorite and destroy him. Ge Hong pays specific attention to various forms of exorcism and protective magic, those in the first place are Daoist talismans and amulets. “Middle country canonical book for following the calendar” says, “All those seeking the Dao, on a certain day chosen by Heaven and in a certain hour chosen by Heaven, must apply various methods to destroy terrible demons. These men should use charms and magical scriptures against them. On the day of a certain spherical animal, in the hour of a certain spherical animal, as that human enters sacred mountains, they must be able to act in a way that any possible evil creatures, tigers, wolves, poisonous snakes, robbers, and villains could not harm them and did not dare even to come near them.” [4]

“Someone once asked about the way to protect themselves from an army of demons from shrines and joss-houses in the mountains and by the rivers. Baopuzi said, “Dao people usually wear on their waist amulets of Heaven and Water, amulets of the The Supreme August Bamboo Ambassador, as well as the left half of the credential plate of Laozi. If such a man also keeps and follows the Dao and concentrates their mind on contemplation of the Three Armies General, then no demons dare to come near him. If we speak about what should be used in the second term, then one should address the discussions on registers of whole demon lot. If that one knows true names of all the demons of the Celestial Empire, kept in the “Records of Nine Sacrificial tripods of the plans of Baize”, then any demon would immediately vanish.” [4]

One particularly interesting moment in the quote above is Ge Hong mentioning that knowing the names of the demons will give power to control them during exorcism ritual. The same fact is stated by Christian exorcists, who believed that name bears specific meaning and ensures control over a demon, while in the name of Christ they are cast away.

In Christian tradition, physical and spiritual healing practices were combined as two **different types of diseases**, as shown in the following example.

“Not far from the city of Caesarea Palaestinae there is a mountain named The Place of the Ark. Next to this mountain lies a desert, where live men, leading lives as hermits. Among those men I recognized blessed and righteous Martinian [a Christian Saint], who lived on that mountain. Since his youth this Holy man, who fell in love with God, has done much against evil. Thus, being young and beautiful in body, in the age of 18 he left the city, its people, and their worries, dedicating himself to calm and lonely life. He settled down in this desert and lived there for 25 years, leading angelic life on earth. That is why God bestowed the gift of healing on him, and many were healed by Lord through those venerable prayers. Thus, many demon-possessed, who came to the mountain to see him, were released from evil, and many tortured by fevers got blessing from the Saint and were healed, and many others who suffered were healed by Lord through his prayers. From day to day this blessed Martinian succeeded in his self-sacrifice, and the greatest glory of this venerable man was spreading far and near, and all those who heard of it came to see him on the mountain and receive help. As of the day of February 13.” [33]

In Christian tradition, demons are those angels who came down to side of Lucifer and were cast down to Hell. Thus, the ability to exorcise demons comes from God himself, who through his angels teaches people to fight the Devil. Archangel Raphael is a powerful healer, as specified in Christian and Jewish traditions. Not only does he show a way to cure mental illnesses and physical traumas, but also teaches the healer how to use earthly medicines. A healer may ask Raphael for help, so that Raphael taught him what treatment is correct during the illness.

“...God sent me to heal you and your daughter-in-law Sarah. I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand and serve before the Glory of the Lord.” [20] The Archangel taught Tobiah how to cure his father’s blindness using fish’s gall and expel the demon burning heart and liver of the creature. “Tobiah, mindful of Raphael’s instructions, took the fish’s liver and heart from the bag where he had them, and put them on the embers intended for incense. The odor of the fish repulsed the demon, and it fled to the upper regions of Egypt; Raphael went in pursuit of it and there bound it hand and foot...” [20]

In addition to prayers as an essential and most effective way to exorcise demons in Christian tradition, supportive methods included laying on of hands, usage of anointing oil, touching relics of the Saints or icons.

St. John of Cronstadt healed by prayer in the name of Christ. “John used to come to people, those who were poor, drunk, abandoned, or with heavy fate. And also to those who held demons and Devil within. John got famous for his abilities for exorcism. He sought and exorcised the Devil. The ritual was simple and did not last long. The Holy man just reached the obsessed, put his hand on their head and said, “Be gone!”” [34]

One of the examples of exorcising demons by means of relics is as follows. “A man named Jacob Okhanov came into convent and took monkery as Joachim. Then he was appointed to rewrite Holy Scriptures, but fell into temptation and started to read sorcery book and practice magic. Lord was angered by this disrespectful monk, who tried to heal a demon-possessed brought by his relatives to touch the relics of St. Nicetas Stylites [a great Christian Saint]. People complained to the hegumen, but the monk refused to admit his relation to sorcery. At that very moment, when the possessed leaned down to kiss the chains of the Saint, the insolent monk was thrown down to the ground by some unknown power. He screamed for long and then died, while Ilarion, who was possessed by demon, got healed.” [35]

II. Conclusion

The comparison of the concepts of Healing, as described in the Lives of the Saints in Daoist and Christian traditions, makes obvious that such ability of the Saints is widespread and highly respected in both traditions. Both in Christianity and in Daoism, the healing may be physical or spiritual, while the second in both cases means exorcism, i.e. casting evil spirits away.

Beside the semantic similarity of the concepts of Healing in the Lives of the Saints, those Lives also have some common points in their literary aspect. The story itself is short and brief, it includes references on a certain historical period and/or a place where the miracle was made.

What concerns exorcising practices, Christian tradition primarily used prayers, while Daoist tradition considered amulets to be the most effective. Apart from amulets, there could be spells, potions, talismans, mirrors, objects and animals. Even though in Christian tradition the main method of fighting evil, as well as physical illnesses, is a prayer, other ways of healing include bowing to the relics of the Saints or icons, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil. However, comparison of healing methods in Daoist and Christian traditions shows that the way of making healing potions in Daoism is closer to scientific medicine, while Christian people tend to rely on the Will of God. The difference in two approaches is caused by different natures of the traditions themselves. Thus, Daoist tradition has been initially aiming at the self-improvement of an individual and the freedom of the perception of the world, as Daoism never had to compete with other religions to gain more believers. At the same time, Christian tradition grew popular being rivaled by a plenty of other religious traditions and cults, so due to social and political aspects it is reasonable for it to be aiming at the afterworld retribution and closer connection with God by means of righteousness and sins.

Common genre peculiarities: linguistic analysis shows the connection between the form and the contents of the Lives. Briefness is caused by the need to convey core information, because a short story is easily remembered and passed on. Short and precise wording of the Lives is an attempt to create a genre unity, which is a combination of various religious meanings. Mentioning dates and places of birth and/or miracle making of the Saint ensures the reader in the reality of the events occurring to the Saint. Diffused image and absence of any descriptions for character’s worries and thoughts also help to make up a perfect religious image of the Saint.

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