

CHRISTMAS AND THE SAVIOR

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Abstract: *Two words of the Romanian vocabulary, relevant for both their religious implications, and for their origin, have been analyzed. It is not rare to invoke etymology when trying to reconstruct realities of the past. The problems begin when a given etymology is erroneous. The two cases are also relevant from this point of view.*

The first is Crăciun 'Christmas,' also (at dialectal level) 'piece of wood, a branch'. The various attempts to explain its origin from Latin (the most evoked is creatio, creationis), from Sl. Kračun, and even from Albanian kërcû are erroneous. The analysis attempts a radical correction to all these explanations. It is connected to the old beliefs in fires, in this case connected to winter solstice. Frazer's The Golden Bough offers relevant parallels in various cultural areas. A brief comparison with Hanukkah is also presented.

*The second series of terms refers to the semantic sphere 'to save someone from sin, error or evil'. This is reflected in the forms a mântui 'to save, to redeem' (in the religious sense), mântuire, the corresponding noun, and Mântuitorul 'the Saviour', i.e., Jesus Christ. The hypothesis of a Hungarian origin of the Romanian forms should be discarded, although largely accepted. Neither the linguistic-etymological approach, nor the place of these forms in the general vocabulary allows for such a view. The Romanian forms must be explained as derived from Latin *manu tuitus < manu tueor, the initial meaning referring to a doctor's hands healing a sick or wounded person, then extended to the magic hands of Jesus. Both the classical Latin texts, and the early Christian texts, notably St. Augustine's Confessions offer clear examples.*

Keywords: *Christmas, Midwinter fires, to heal, magic hands.*

The paper concentrates on the specific situation of two religious terms in Romanian: Crăciun 'Christmas' but also, at dialectal level, 'piece of wood, branch' (this latter meaning absent in most dictionaries) and the series derived from the verb a mântui 'to redeem, to free from sins', hence the noun mântuire and Mântuitor, usually with the definite article Mântuitorul 'the Savior' i.e., Jesus Christ.

The terms represent a specific category in the religious vocabulary: one is from the substratum, and initially referred to Pre-Christian practices, the other is from a specific evolution of Latin manu tueor 'to save by (putting the) hand', initially a medical syntagma.

I. Rom. Crăciun ‘Christmas’ and ‘piece of wood’ – an unexpected problem

There is a lot of debate about Crăciun in the Romanian etymological studies. The problem was solved a long time ago, but many specialists didn't pay much attention to it. After reviewing the main points of this old analysis, I will make a few comments.¹

The winter solstice is a major event celebrated all over the world. Frazer wrote about this in *The Golden Bough*, which was written more than 100 years ago.² The linguists don't refer to such major analyses, unfortunately. Rom. Crăciun should be understood in the light of similar creeds and beliefs that are spread all over Europe and the world. Eng. *Yule* is a Pre-Christian word, Old English *gēola*, initially a pagan festival lasting twelve days. The meaning ‘Christmas’ is a newer cultic stratum, also reflected in the origin of Eng. Easter, of Germanic origin, perhaps related to the goddess *Ēastre*, once celebrated in spring. Italian has *ceppo* ‘tree stump, log’ and, in the syntagma *Ceppo di Natale* ‘Yule log’, or simply *Ceppo*, a synonym of *Natale*, the usual name of Christmas in Italian.

This helps us understand the realities of the region. It is a festival that is obviously connected to the winter solstice, which is the shortest day and longest night of the year. People used to burn logs and pieces of wood to invoke the sun to come back and bring warm days again.

These principles are also evident in the formulas that are prevalent throughout Southeast Europe, as well as in other regions.

Bulgarian *bădni večer* = Serbian *badnje več* ‘the night of the logs’ = Albanian *Nata e buzmit* ‘the night of the Yule log’ = Eng. *Yule* = Italian *Ceppo di Natale*.

This will bring us closer to Bulg. *kračun* (кращун), a dialectal form explained in the Bulgarian etymological dictionary in clear words: ‘folk festival in summer or winter at solstice’³. The word is also spread in Russian *koročun* ‘зимно слънцестояние’, dialectal Ukrainian and Hungarian (hereafter Hu.) *karácsony*.

A key point in the discussion is that Rom. *Crăciun* ‘Christmas’ (it should be better translated as ‘Yule’) also has the meaning ‘piece of wood’ at dialectal level. Current Romanian dictionaries ignore this meaning in order to ‘simplify’ the explanation, including the most spread such dictionary, *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (the explanatory dictionary of Romanian known as DEX)⁴. This word is obviously related to Albanian *kërci* ‘log, stump’, translated

¹ Mușu 1982, pp. 21–38.

² Frazer 2009 (first published 1890), p. 1485 ff., referring to the Yule logs.

³ BER 2, 726: народен празник по летен или зимен кръговрат на слънцето.

⁴ The online version dexonline.ro has been used, as it is permanently updated. The first

in German as ‘Baumstumpf, Stubben, Wurzelstock’⁵. The explanation given in the Albanian etymological dictionary is confusing: considered derived from *kërc* ‘stump’, in its turn from a Sl. form **kǫrčъ* used ‘in semi-pagan Christian rites’⁶. Trying to follow the logic of these explanations: Albanian *kërci* is a local derivation from *kërc*, in its turn of Slavic origin; after this derivation occurred, the word was borrowed by the Slavs (Bulg. *kračun* etc.), and the Romanians⁷.

Such tortuous explanations lead to nothing. Albanian cannot ultimately be the source of Rom. *Crăciun* and Bulg. *kračun*. Given its widespread circulation in East and South-East Europe, the word must be explained as a substratum element of Thracian origin in both Romanian and Bulgarian, perhaps also in Albanian. It is not sustainable to assume that Albanian had such a major influence on Romanian and Bulgarian several centuries ago. Hu. *Karácsony* is from Romanian, even if the etymological dictionaries of Hungarian claim a Bulgarian or generally a South Slavic origin.⁸ Such a hypothesis is not sustainable either.

Perhaps the only unclear detail is whether Bulg. *kračun* reflects a loan directly from Thracian, or it reflects a transmission via Romanian. The answer is directly linked to the answer to the question ‘until when was Thracian spoken?’. Ivan Duridanov, when analyzing the place-name *Plovdiv*, answered to this question a long time ago: this place name was adapted directly from Thracian⁹. This case cannot be isolated, there are many other such correspondences that cannot be discussed here, such as Rom. *stăpân* and Bulg. *stopánin*¹⁰. Although there is no conclusive argument, it may be inferred that Thracian was still spoken when the Slavs settled south of the Danube. Therefore, Duridanov’s analysis of the place-name *Plovdiv* may serve as a reference analysis.

edition of DEX goes back to 1975, with many reprints.

⁵ WAD 227.

⁶ Orel 181, and *kërc* on the preceding page.

⁷ For the general situation of *Crăciun* and its relations with other Balkan languages (Albanian, Bulgarian) see also Brăncuș 1991; extensively, in the context of other borrowings from the Thracian-Illyrian substratum in Slavic languages, in Paliga 1997 and, in a revised version, Paliga 2006b.

⁸ Benkő 1992, p. 693: ‘Bulgarian or South Slavic origin’; this is an abridged variant of the hypothesis expressed in Benkő 1967–1980, p. 2, 371. The same hypothesis is in the newest etymological dictionary of Hungarian published online, and also available as PDF: Gerstner 2022, s.v.

⁹ Duridanov 1986 and 1989.

¹⁰ For Bulgarian, see the long discussion in BER 7, 477–479. As I tried to show many years ago, these are old substratum (Thracian) elements: Paliga 1987. It is an essential term of the social organization of southeast Europe in post-classical times and beyond, during the migrations and later in the Middle Ages.

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As a last point: Rom. *Crăciun* and its associated winter solstice feasts (Bulg. *bădni večer*, Alb. *nata e buzmit* etc.) as well as Eng. *Yule* reflect the same invocation of light during the period when night is longest and day shortest. This corresponds to the Hebrew Hanukkah. Given the differences between calendars, Christmas and Hanukkah are rarely celebrated exactly in the same period. Hanukkah starts on the 25th day of Kislev, which doesn't match a fixed date in the Christian calendar. It lasts 8 days, every day a new candle of the Menorah is lit. Even with all the differences, and even the official meaning, it is clear that the custom of Yule and Hanukkah is tied to fire, which calls for light to return to the earth.¹¹

The picture below shows a Menorah in the 3rd day of Hanukkah



A menorah is lit as part of the Hanukkah celebration. Flickr Creative Commons Credit: David Goehring

A note on Hanukkah

I asked Gustavo Loria, my colleague and friend, to tell me what he thinks about Hanukkah 'from the inside'. In his e-mail dated Nov. 6, 2023, he wrote:

Hanukkah is the Jewish holiday of lights. There are eight candles lit, and the ninth candle is a *mamash* used to light the other candles.

It is interesting to note that the events associated with this festival are mythical. They are not mentioned in any Jewish consecrated book. The only ancient texts that mention these (the Maccabees' books, which are in fact Greek trans-

¹¹ See Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hanukkah/Traditions> (visited on Sept. 20, 2023).

lations of old Jewish sources) don't mention the legend of Hanukkah, which involves the eight-day illumination of the candles in the Temple. Hanukkah is referred to in Talmudic and late sources.

II. **Manu tuitus*: 'saved by His hand'¹²

The second part of this analysis is dedicated to the Romanian term *a mântui* 'to save, to redeem,' and its derived forms *mântuit* 'saved, redeemed,' *mântuire* 'salvation, redemption' (initially the long infinitive of the verb), and *Mântuitorul* 'the Savior' = Jesus Christ. It is thought that *a mântui* reflects a loan from Hu. *menteni* 'to save,' and the other forms derived by internal means. Despite a quasi-general circulation among linguists, I will try to show that this hypothesis is unsustainable.¹³ The Hungarian forms under scrutiny are¹⁴:

Root *ment-* (*valamitől*) 'to save (from something), to free (from something)', with several derivatives, e.g. *mentő* 'rescuer'; *mentes* 'free, freed'; *mentesít* 'to free; to relieve (from something)'; *mentőautó* 'rescue car, ambulance'; *mentős* 'ambulance driver' etc.

There is, on the other hand, a series derived from the form prefixed with *meg-*, e.g. *megment* 'to save, to escape' from danger, in expressions like *megmenti a bőrét* 'to save one's neck' etc.); *megmentő* 'rescuer'; *megmentés* 'rescue, escape' etc.

Considering that the series *a mântui* – *mântuire* – *Mântuitor* refers to essential terms of the Romanian Christian terminology, the strictly linguistic-phonetic aspect is not sufficient. Understanding the evolution of the terms requires to identify the old, initial meaning. The semantic and, of course, the phonetic evolution of the Romanian term *a mântui* must be explained if it's of Hungarian descent, i.e., assuming a pre-Christian form that has gradually acquired new meanings.

However, from this perspective, things are not easy to explain.¹⁵ It seemed sufficient to assume a Hungarian origin of the Romanian word as early as the

¹² This part is based on Paliga 2011 with some new data, but removing some parts of the discussions regarding the Hungarian-Romanian linguistic contacts, which may prove too technical in this context.

¹³ We would like to thank our colleague Prof. Dr. Molnár Szabolcs, Department of Hungarian Studies at the University of Bucharest, for clarifying the situation of the Hungarian forms quoted in this paper.

¹⁴ The analysis of the Hungarian forms is limited to the essential aspects; an enlarged analysis is in Paliga 2011 (in Romanian).

¹⁵ See the etymological dictionaries of Hungarian quoted above. The root *ment* is considered derived from *menik* 'to save, to rescue' of old Finno-Ugric origin. The general opinion among the Hungarian linguists is that Rom. *a mântui* is a loan from Hungarian.

19th century. All researchers seem to agree with this hypothesis, with nuances from author to author. One such reference should include Sextil Pușcariu, an authority in the history of Romanian linguistics.¹⁶

The verbal ending *uí* is indeed specific to some loans from Hungarian. Nevertheless, many verbs ending in *uí* are older, based on the Latin heritage, and derived by internal means, e.g. *răzui* ‘to scrape’ < *rade* ‘to raze, to shave (off)’, *mânui* ‘to handle’ < *mână* ‘hand’, *prețui* ‘to evaluate; to cherish, to treasure’ < *preț* ‘price’ etc.

Al. Rosetti, who was one of the most influential linguists of the communist era, thought that some Hungarian words, like *bănui*, *bântui*, *cheltui*, *mîntui* came into the language through a Slavic intermediary¹⁷. The ‘Slavic connection’ does not, and cannot, explain the complex situation of *a mân-tui* and its derivatives. Furthermore, the author does not provide a detailed explanation, taking the situation for granted. It is uncertain, based on this perspective, how and why Hungarian elements would have been transmitted to Romanian through a Slavic intermediary, rather than through direct linguistic contact. One may suspect that the author felt compelled to push the explanation further because the closed nasal sequence *mânt-* (*mântui*), similar to forms of Latin origin (such as *legământ* ‘covenant, commitment’ or in a form like *sân(t)* < Lat. *sanctus*¹⁸ does not at all indicate a borrowing from Hungarian, even if we stop at the purely phonetic aspect, leaving aside the cultic aspect – although this, in fact, is crucial.

The hypothesis that there had been some old Hungarian borrowings through Slavic intermediaries corresponded to another hypothesis of Rosetti’s, namely that Romanian has ‘early borrowings from Slavic’, dated in the 6th–7th centuries.¹⁹ As of present, it is widely recognized that the vast majority of the earliest Romanian words of Slavic origin can be dated to the period between the 12th and 14th centuries. This period corresponds to the Second Bulgarian Tsardom, a period that also signified the transition from the Latin to the Slavonic liturgy among the Romanians. Some place names, which are of obvious Slavic origin, may eventually be dated before the 12th century, but there is no criterion for

¹⁶ Pușcariu 1976, pp. 310–311; this is a reprint with additions and corrections of the 1st edition published in 1940. Here Pușcariu reviews the elements of Hungarian origin in Romanian.

¹⁷ Rosetti 1986, p. 267. Comments on the Hungarian-Romanian linguistic contacts are in Paliga 2023; a limited number of such elements in Paliga 2006a. Some are, in fact, substratum (Thracian) elements in Romanian. See the discussion in Paliga 2018.

¹⁸ Preserved in some religious terms like *Sântămărie*, *Sântămăria* (cf. Croatian *Stomorin*) or the place name *Sângiorz* which corresponds to Croatian *Sudurad* < *Sanctus Georgios*. It interferes with *sfânt* ‘saint’ < Slavic *světŏ*.

¹⁹ Mihăilă 1971.

such dating.²⁰ Ivan Duridanov also thought that Romanian had old Slavic elements, which date back to the 8th century C.E.²¹

The authors of etymological dictionaries of the Romanian language, including the current explanatory dictionaries, tacitly accept the hypothesis of the Hungarian origin of *mântui*.²² Hu. *ment* ‘to save’ is considered derived from *menik* ‘id.’, seemingly an old Uralic element²³. Those who invoke a supposed Slavic intermediary do not offer a plausible explanation either. The supposed intermediary would probably be S.-Cr. *mentovati*. Miklosich also refers to a Ukrainian form²⁴, both Slavic forms being considered derived from Hu. *ment*. The Hungarian-Romanian linguistic contacts would require new and profound analyses²⁵.

But let us return to the forms *a mântui*, *mântuit*, *Mîntuitor*.

Mântuire ‘salvation’ as a spiritual experience

Salvation is an intimate, fundamental experience for a believer; salvation means ‘deliverance from sin, divine salvation.’ The secular meanings are derived from this ancient meaning, although the DEX, for example, cites them in reverse order, probably considering that if Hu. *menteni* is the origin of the Romanian form, then the sense of evolution would be from profane to sacred. We believe it was the opposite. But let’s not anticipate. The meanings presented in DEX are (quoting from the most recent edition, the electronic one on the website www.dexonline.ro)

1. transitive and reflexive ‘to save oneself (from danger, from bondage, from death)’;
2. (pop.) ‘to cure (a disease)’;
3. (in ecclesiastical language) ‘to forgive or obtain pardon for sins; to escape divine punishment; to be delivered; to be saved’;
4. (popular) ‘to end, to finish’;
5. (in expressions) ‘to be saved from sins’ = ‘to die’.

The last two meanings evoke Christ’s crucifixion.

Accepting the hypothesis of a Hungarian origin of Rom. *a mântui* and its

²⁰ The problem of the “oldest Slavic elements in Romanian” was approached in Paliga and Teodor 2009, chapter 7 (p. 185 sq.), especially pp. 204–212; and Paliga 2012.

²¹ Duridanov 1991.

²² E.g. Șăineanu 1925, p. 379; Raevskij and Gabinskij 1978, p. 271; Ciorănescu 2002, p. 512; Vinereanu 2009: 525 and DEX.

²³ Benkő 1992, p. 961; TESz 2, 889 (s.v. *menekül*); Gerstner 2022 s.v. *ment* (online etymological dictionary).

²⁴ Miklosich 1886, p. 190.

²⁵ For the time being, see the relatively brief analysis in Paliga 2018.

derived forms would be quite peculiar, as it is a fundamental term considered to have entered the Romanian language after the 10th century, or even after the 12th century, if we adhere to the hypothesis that the Romanian homeland was located in the Balkans and abruptly crossed the Danube in the 12th century.²⁶ It would be the only Christian term of Hungarian origin, a semantic sphere where the Slavic influence, important as well, is limited to the terminology of ecclesiastic organization, not to the basic terms.

To note that the equivalent to Rom. *a mântui* is not *ment* in Hungarian, the terms in use being of other origin. In a brief summary, the situation is as follows:

a. *Krisztus Szabadító* or, with a prefix, *megszabadító* ‘Savior’; the root is of Slavic origin, with a later development in Hungarian: *szabadít* – *megszabadít* ‘to relieve of a sin, to absolve’; *megszabadság* ‘salvation, liberation’;

b. (*Krisztus*) *üdvözítő* ‘(Christ) the Savior’. The root *üdvöz-* ‘to save, to be-tify’ is of Uralic origin, and later adapted to the Christian terminology. There are numerous derived forms, some of them with religious (Christian) connotations.

c. *Krisztus Megváltó* ‘Christ the Savior, the Redeemer’, derived from *vált* ‘to change, to replace’, with the prefix *meg-*: *megvált* ‘to redeem’²⁷.

The brief analysis above shows how the Hungarian form *ment-* is relatively isolated, having no Christian meaning. If Romanian may have borrowed a Hungarian word for redemption and salvation, then it would have been one of the three terms quoted above, or all of them.

But let us try to unveil the real, initial meaning of *mântui* – *mântuire* – *Mântuitor*.

His Hand: Salvation, Redemption

The explanation of the Romanian forms *mântui* – *mântuire* – *Mântuitor* ‘to redeem – salvation – Savior’ (respectively) was given, many years ago, while translating hundreds of pages of St. Augustine, by the Latinist Vasile Sav. I will continue his explanation, which we had the opportunity to discuss on several occasions before his early demise in September 2003. He didn’t write down his thoughts on *mântuire* ‘salvation.’

The earliest form must have been **mântuit*, which reflects Latin *manu tuitus* ‘healed, saved by hand’, initially a deponent verb: *manu tueor*, which also got a medical meaning. It was and still is a part of the Christian experience to be

²⁶ This still is a current hypothesis among many Hungarian historians. Being a political issue, rather than a scientific discourse, it cannot be commented here.

²⁷ For a more detailed discussion regarding the Christian terminology in Hungarian see Paliga 2011 (in Romanian).

healed by the hands of Jesus. Once touched by his hand, they had a Great Revelation, Salvation. From the post-classical, colloquial form **manu-tuire* ‘to save by (using the) hand’ a colloquial form was created; later also **manu tuitorius* ‘He who heals by his hand’ = Jesus. This is how the early Christians — and initially many non-Christians — saw the miraculous role of hands, specifically of Jesus’ hands, almost two millennia ago. This is evident from the numerous passages in which the Holy Fathers elucidate the miraculous feats accomplished by Jesus’ hands. Hundreds of documentary films, many of which can be found online, show His miraculous healing hands.

Understanding salvation as a divine act of Jesus’ hands is part of a long-standing belief about hands that existed before the Christian faith. The Indo-Europeans tabooed the hand. For this reason, it is not possible to reconstruct an old Indo-European form for the meaning ‘hand’. Various linguistic and cultural groups developed the semantic sphere ‘hand’ in various ways and starting from various roots: Latin *manus*, Germanic *hand*, Slavic *roka*, Greek *cheir* etc. are all local derivations from roots specific to those languages. In Slavic, for example, it is ‘the one which bends and throws’; in Greek, *cheir* ‘hand’ is associated with the initial meaning ‘to grasp, to seize’, hence the scientific modern term Eng. *surgeon*, Fr. *chirurgien* etc. which are based on Lat. *chirurgia* < Greek *cheir-ourgia* ‘handiwork, surgery’ = the miraculous work of a doctor’s hands, compound from *cheir* ‘hand’ and *ergon* ‘work’.

Let us return to Romanian and briefly present the forms derived from or related to *mână* ‘hand’.

— *mână* ‘hand’, the basic term < Lat. *manus*, fem. gender. Latin words of feminine gender not ending in *a* or *e* (-em in the accusative singular) were changed to one of these endings, e.g. *soror* > *soră*;

— *mâner* ‘handle’ (noun), derived from *mână* < Lat. *manus*;

— *a mânui* ‘to handle’, also derived from *mână*, with some newer meanings calqued after Fr. *manœuvrer*.

— *a mântui*, the word under scrutiny, together with its derived forms *mân-tuire* and *Mântuitor*.

The series *mână* – *mâner* – *mânui* – *mântui* is selfexplanatory. As some may believe, the association between *mântui* and *mână* is not a folk etymology.

Latin *manus* was common in various Latin expressions. Let us glance at just a few common expressions, and note also that, in certain contexts, *manus* also means ‘authority, power, force’, hence the meaning ‘to heal by touching with the hand’²⁸:

- *victoria in manu nobis est*, Sall. C. 20, 10: the victory is in our hands;

²⁸ Most of the examples are from the Latin-English digital dictionary *Scriba* and compared with the Latin-French online dictionary *Prima Elementa*.

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- *in manibus* Mars ipse, Virg. : [you have god] Mars in your hands = the result of the battle is in your hands, i.e. the result depends on you;

- *haec non sunt in nostra manu*, Cic. Fam. 14, 2, 3: these are not in our hands = this does not depend on us;

- *manu mederi*, Cels. praef. 1: **to heal by using the hand = to be a surgeon**;

The meaning of this phrase has been preserved in Romanian from the informal Latin of the early Christians. It is evident that this was a widely accepted and informal formula, which was preserved as such in a peripheral region of the Roman Empire.

Now let us review the meanings of *tueor*, *tueri*, *tuitus sum*, a deponent verb in classical Latin. One of its meanings, 'to practice something carefully, to administer,' is exactly what we are looking for.

- *tueri ad* (adversus) + acc. (*tueri ab* + abl.): to defend (of), to protect from something;

- *ad omnes repentinos casus turrim tueri*: to protect the tower against any unexpected attack;

- *torva tueri*, Virg. En. 6, 467 (*torva* : adj., here neuter plural, used as an adverb): to cast evil, angry glances;

- *tueri transversa*, Virg. : to look squinting;

- passive meaning, *tueri*: **to be defended, preserved, kept (in a given state)**.

The aforementioned meaning has been well-preserved in Romanian, originating from the widely-used meanings prevalent in both classical and post-classical Latin, and acquiring a fresh meaning within a Christian context.

The meaning and implications of the 'miraculous hand' are portrayed as vividly as possible in the works of the Christian fathers. We have chosen, for example, some significant passages from the *Confessions* of St Augustine.

I have used, in particular, the bilingual Latin-French edition *Confessiones / Confessions*, texte établi et traduit par Pierre de Labriolle, 10th edition. Bilingual ed. Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1969. For the English version, the translation of Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press 1991

Liber I

XV, 24

Exaudi, domine, deprecationem meam, ne deficiat anima mea sub disciplina tua, neque deficiam in confitendo tibi miserationes tuas, quibus eruisti me ab omnibus viis meis pessimis, ut dulcescas mihi super omnes seductiones, quas sequabar, **et amem te validissime, et amplexer manum tuam totis praecordiis meis**, et eruas me ab omni temptatione usque in finem.

'Lord hear my prayer' (Ps. 60: 2) that my soul may not collapse (Ps. 83: 3) under your discipline (Ps. 54: 2), and may not suffer exhaustion in confessing to

you your mercies, by which you have delivered me from all my evil ways. Bring to me a sweetness surpassing all the seductive delights which I pursued. Enable me to love you with all my strength that **I may clasp your hand with all my heart**. ‘Deliver me from all temptation to the end’ (Ps. 17: 30).

Liber II

II, 3

Quis mihi modularetur aerumnam meam et novissimarum rerum fugaces pulchritudines in usum verteret earumque suavitatibus metas praefigeret, ut usque ad coniugale litus exaestuarent fluctus aetatis meae, si tranquillitas in eis non poterat esse fine procreandorum liberorum contenta, sicut praescribit lex tua, domine, qui formas etiam propaginem mortis nostrae, **potens imponere lenem manum ad temperamentum spinarum a paradiso tuo secluserum?**

If only someone could have imposed restraint on my disorder. That would have transformed to good purpose the fleeting experiences of beauty in these lowest of things, and fixed limits to indulgence in their charms. Then the stormy waves of my youth would have finally broken on the shore of marriage. Even so, I could not have been wholly content to confine sexual union to acts intended to procreate children, as your law prescribes, Lord. For you shape the propagation of our mortal race, **imposing your gentle hand to soften the brambles which were excluded from your paradise**.

Note: Augustine alludes either to Book III of Genesis, when Yahweh punishes Adam for his sin (‘and the earth shall gnaw thorns and thistles, and you shall eat the grass of the field’), or to the words of Jesus: “on the last day men shall not have wives, nor women men; they shall be as the angels of the Lord in heaven”.

Liber III

XI, 19

Et misisti **manum** tuam ex alto, et de hac profunda caligine eruisti animam meam [...]

‘You **put forth your hand** from on high’ (Ps. 143: 7), and from this deep darkness ‘you delivered my soul’ (Ps. 85: 13).

Liber V

I, 1

Accipe sacrificium confessionum mearum de **manu** linguae meae, quam formasti et excitasti, ut confiteatur nomini tuo, et sana omnia ossa mea, et dicant: domine, quis similis tibi? neque enim docet te, quid in se agatur, qui tibi confitetur; quia oculum tuum non excludit cor clausum, **nec manum tuam repellit duritia hominum**: sed solvis eam, cum voles, aut miserans aut vindicans, et non

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est qui se abscondat a calore tuo. sed te laudet anima mea, ut amet te, et confiteatur tibi miserationes tuas, ut laudet te.

Accept the sacrifice of my confessions offered by 'the hand of my tongue' (Prov. 18: 21) which you have formed and stirred up to confess your name (Ps. 53: 8). 'Heal all my bones' (Ps. 6: 3) and let them say 'Lord who is like you?' (Ps. 34: 10). He who is making a confession to you is not instructing you of that which is happening within him. The closed heart does not shut out your eye, and **your hand is not kept away by the hardness of humanity**, but you melt that when you wish, either in mercy or in punishment, and there is 'none who can hide from your heat' (Ps. 18: 7). Let my soul praise you that it may love you, and confess to you your mercies that it may praise you (Ps. 118: 175; 145: 2).

II, 13

ita ille Faustus, qui multis laqueus mortis extitit, meum quo captus eram relaxare iam coeperat nec volens nec sciens. **Manus enim tuae, deus meus, in abdito providentiae tuae, non deserebant animam meam.** [...]

And this Faustus, without wanting to or knowing it, who had been a death trap for many, came to untie the one I was in. And then, in the mystery of your providence, **your hands, Lord, did not leave my soul.** [...]

Liber VI

V, 7

[...] deinde paulatim tu, domine, **manu mitissima et misericordissima** pertractans et componens cor meum, consideranti, quam innumerabilia crederem, quae non viderem neque cum gererentur affuissem [...]

[...] Then little by little, Lord, **with a most gentle and merciful hand you touched and calmed my heart.** I considered the innumerable things I believed which I had not seen [...]

VIII, 13

et inde tamen **manu validissima et misericordissima eruisti eum tu, et docuisti eum non sui habere, sed tui fiduciam; sed longe postea.**

Nevertheless, from this **you delivered him by your most strong and merciful hand**, and you taught him to put his confidence not in himself but in you (Isa. 57: 13). But that was much later.

XII, 21

A quorum ego granditate quidem animi longe aberam et deligatus morbo carnis mortifera suavitate trahebam catenam meam, solvi timens, **et quasi con-**

cusso vulnere, repellens verba bene suadentis tamquam manum solventis.

Fettered by the flesh's morbid impulse and lethal sweetness, I dragged my chain, but was afraid to be free of it. Like a man whose wound has been hit, I pushed aside the words of **good advice like the hand loosing the bond.**

Liber VII

VIII, 12

[...] **et residebat tumor meus ex occulta manu medicinae tuae**, aciesque conturbata et contenebrata mentis meae acri collyrio salubrium dolorum de die in diem sanabatur.

[...] **My swelling [tumor] was reduced by your hidden healing hand**, and my mind's troubled and darkened eye, under the hot dressing of salutary sorrows, was from 'day to day' (Ps. 60: 9) brought back to health.

XV, 21

Et respexi alia, et vidi tibi debere quia sunt, et in te cuncta finita, sed aliter, non quasi in loco, **sed quia tu es omnitenens manu veritate**, et omnia vera sunt, in quantum sunt, nec quicquam est falsitas, nisi cum putatur esse quod non est.

I turned my gaze on other things. I saw that to you they owe their existence, and that in you all things are finite, not in the sense that the space they occupy is bounded but in the sense **that you hold all things in your hand by your truth.** So all things are real insofar as they have being, and the term 'falsehood' applies only when something is thought to have being which does not.

XXI, 27

Quoniam iustus es, domine; nos autem peccavimus, inique fecimus, inpie gessimus, **et gravata est super nos manus tua.**

For you, Lord, are just. But we have sinned, we have done wickedly (Dan. 3: 27, 29), we have behaved impiously (1 Kgs. 8: 47), and **your hand has been heavy upon us** (Ps. 31: 4).

The New Testament also contains paragraphs referring to Jesus' magic hands, for example Mark 7: 31–37²⁹

After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and **they begged him to place his**

²⁹ <https://eu.citizen-times.com/story/life/2016/05/13/jesus-willing-get-his-hands-dirty-heal/84158138/> [July 4th, 2023]

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hand on the man for healing. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and **put his fingers in the man's ears.** —Mark 7: 31-37 (CEB)

Karel Čapek and the magic of hand.

In the context of this analysis, it is relevant to quote a paragraph in Karel Čapek's famous novel *Továrna na absolutno* (The Factory of Absolute), ch. VIII. Kuzenda is one of the characters.

Kuzenda na mne skládal ruce, mluvil pekař tiše a uneseně, – a najednou se mně v prsou rozlilo takový teplo. Víte, tak to ve mně luplo, a já jsem začal dýchat, jako bych lítal na nebi.

Kuzenda was **holding [put] his hands on me.** The baker was speaking quietly and carried away. ... and suddenly there was such a warmth in my chest. You see, it was like something broke inside me, and I started to breathe as if I were flying in the sky".

(My translation)

II.

Here is a contemporary version of the beliefs in Jesus' hands, as they appear in a text found randomly on the internet. The boldface parts are mine.

Melinda Mahand

Jesus' Hands

I've heard the Bible stories

About Jesus of Galilee

How He used His hands to heal the sick

And to make the blind man see.

When the multitudes were hungry,

Compassionate hands gave them bread.

When broken hearts were grieving,

Loving hands raised the dead.

When His followers were frightened,

Mighty hands calmed the sea.

When Zaccheus looked for Him,

Friendly hands brought him down from that tree.

When the woman at the well searched for God,

Teaching hands showed her the way.

When His disciples needed strength or help,

Prayerful hands taught them to pray.

But I'd only heard the stories.
I'd never seen the hands,
Till I saw you with the children.
Then I began to understand,
Your hands are His hands.
You've surrendered them to His will.
Now He works through your hands,
And touches children still.
Thank you for the hands that teach,
That lead and love throughout the year.
And thank you for the chance to see,
Jesus' hands are working here.

(Quoted here by kind permission of Melinda Mahand)

Final note

There are many studies analyzing the significance of priests' hands during the mass. Some of them are available on the internet. Two examples are mentioned below.

<https://catholictimescolumbus.org/news/the-catholic-times/bishop-of-fers-healing-mass-anointing-of-the-sick> (Sept. 23rd, 2023)

and

<https://bctorch.com/2020/10/01/hands-of-prayer-explaining-the-priests-gestures/> (Sept. 23rd, 2023)

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ABBREVIATIONS

BER = Georgiev et al. 1971–2017

DEX = dexonline.ro

TESz = Benkő 1967–1980

WAD = Buchholz et al. 1977

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³¹ It is a new print of the first edition published in 1940, București, Fundația pentru literatură și artă, with author’s corrections and additions. Some changes reflect the German edition published in 1943.