

BOOK REVIEW

HYPOSTASES OF OTHERNESS AND SOCIAL SERVICES
PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH

ILARION MĂȚĂ¹

Petronela Polixenia Nistor, *Filantropie și servicii sociale personalizate în Biserica Ortodoxă Română [Philanthropy and professional social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church]*, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 2020

The work “Philanthropy and professional social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church”, written by Petronela Polixenia Nistor, published in 2020 by a famous publishing house: “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University Publishing House in Iasi, treats the subject of social assistance from a religious perspective seriously and fills the romanian journalism picture with its complexity through the analyzes performed and the results obtained. The complexity of the work is given by the research of the charitable and philanthropic field of faith in the Romanian Orthodox Church, carried out especially in the Archdiocese of Iasi.

The author states that the purpose of the paper is to show and explain the social-philanthropic characteristics within the Church and even to present a model of Christian social assistance specific to the Archdiocese of Iasi. I noticed that it was oriented around three important objectives: the identification of the specifics and the significance attributed to the social philanthropic activity of BOR in different environments of the Archdiocese of Iași; identifying the stage and peculiarities of the professionalization of social services offered by BOR in the Archdiocese of Iasi and clarifying the roles of the priest in the process of combining philanthropy with professional social services, which clarifies a number of basic concepts of the work, such as charity, philanthropy, institutionalization and professionalism, faith-based organizations.

In the theoretical part, the human and social dimension of the charitable and philanthropic gesture are exposed. Charity is defined, in the work, as “action (social) oriented towards the other, taking the form of a self-sacrifice, which implies tolerance, it is a form of manifestation of one’s own will (free will),

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without a discriminatory character” (D. Heyd, 2016, p. 20), while Philanthropy means “an act of charity undertaken for the benefit of the poor and the charities” (Ioan M. Stoian, 1994, p. 63). Whether it is the western space (where the term charity is used) or the eastern one (where we meet the concept of philanthropy), the two concepts translate human and social experiences and gestures that represent the foundations of modern social assistance, as stated by E. Zamfir and D. Buzducea, in all societies, they express the deep human nature, related to the absolute (the vertical dimension of existence) and socially (the horizontal dimension of existence).

The impact of this work is guaranteed by the diversity and relevance of the literary sources used (E. Zamfir, D. Buzducea, E. Durkheim, S. Frunză, D. Saulean, T. Gheorghe, M. Olah, etc.), highlighting the role of the Church in the management of human values essential for the Christian life such as: caring for others, love for others and sacrifice as a founding gesture, values that he identifies to be concentrated in the charitable gesture. We understand from the paper that most philanthropic actions include charitable work in the field of education, equality between people, poverty or sanogenetic culture, and resources are not just financial, but involve the philanthropist's private resources, time, social capital and expertise. with the aim of producing a change in the environment in which we live (Matthew Bishop, Michael Green, 2008, p. 49) and that for today's philanthropists, this concept is “a concern for the manifestation of generosity, which pursues the well-being of humanity and human development; this altruistic attitude is most often manifested in the form of donations in money, property or activities to people in need, but also through the endowment of educational institutions, health or any kind of generosity manifested in the social interest” (Gerald Freund, 1996, p. 13).

I appreciate the exposition of the history of institutionalization and professionalization, that there is a tradition and that they are not modern concepts, but they manifested themselves from the beginning. The first forms of institutionalization of charity and philanthropy being identified since the time of Constantine the Great (brepheprophies (swings for abandoned children, up to seven years old), orphanages (orphanages), parthenomies (shelters for young girls from poor families or orphanages), gyrocomies (shelters for old and unsupported widows).

The institutionalization and professionalization of charity enjoys special attention in the book, the author, identifying and highlighting the specifics of social assistance carried out by the Church, its strengths, the peculiarities of social assistance in faith-based organizations with reference to the romanian space. The accents she puts very well are those concerning the involvement and motivations of the welfare and charitable act, the capacity of the Church to organize and manage resources, the complementarity and cooperation with the state system. Since the middle of the first century, the *philanthropic community act* has acquired a church character, we could say institutionally since it was practiced at the level of the local Churches in the different provinces of the

Roman Empire, supported by the Holy Apostles, bishops and ministers of those Churches (E. Durkheim, 1978, pp. 158-180).

Regarding the *professionalization of charity*, it is stated that “first in the British countryside, then in the United States and Western Europe, the consequences of the law initiated by Queen Elizabeth on the poor were the transfer of public responsibility for disadvantaged people and community responsibility. on the care, expressed through the churches, as intermediaries and institutions that offered philanthropic services” (C. Bocancea, 2003, p. 123).

All the theoretical information is supported by the comparative research carried out over three years (2016-2018), on distinct chapters (institutions and services, budget, staff, projects and social assistance programs, beneficiaries) from which we learn that the Church has an appreciable number of specialized social assistance institutions and services (815 institutions in 2018 - social canteens, medical services, residential centers, sheltered housing, day centers, social kindergartens, etc.). These social assistance activities mobilize a financial effort of 24,000,000 euros in 2018, money from direct financial aid and material aid. All these activities are carried out with a significant number of volunteers (9,573), specialized staff (1,486) and only 461 social workers. We also find out from Petronela Nistor's research that the total number of beneficiaries is increasing (104,957 people in 2018).

The summary of the entire care activity carried out by the Church is then put by the author in the equation of a broader concept developed in the West, that of *faith-based organizations*, emphasizing their specificity, characteristics and typology, according to the model of Sider and Unruh (p. 115). Petronela Nistor touches on and explains the importance of developing the social economy, which supports philanthropic activities “in the context of the modern world, the social economy has returned today not only in terms of philosophical arguments, ideologies, but also in terms of practical action” (C. Gavriluță, 2016, p. 49). Researching the specifics of the act of charity and social assistance in the Archdiocese in Iasi, Petronela Polixenia Nistor is investigating 13 archdioceses, 1,221 parishes and 94 monasteries and hermitages. The author's study benefited from a complex, exploratory approach (inspired by the action research model evoked by K. Lewin) using quantitative and qualitative methods and investigating all categories of actors of charity and social assistance (those who provide services beneficiaries and supervisors).

The research results highlight a number of issues and a certain perception of the act of charity and care among professional or non-professional service providers. One of the main problems identified in the field is poverty, and this is often accompanied by spiritual poverty. Therefore, as the author remarks very well, the Archdiocese of Iasi insists on *working with the beneficiary*, and not for the beneficiary.

In conclusion, the work Philanthropy and professional social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Sociological research conducted in the Archdiocese of Iasi signed by Petronela Polixenia Nistor, states that the Church can become

the most important actor in providing professional and efficient social services, given that it has an impressive capacity to mobilize resources and approach beneficiaries, which can lead to streamlining the intervention process.

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