

# FILANTROPIA ȘI ASISTENȚA SOCIALĂ CA IMPERATIVE MISIONARE ALE ORTODOXIEI ROMÂNEȘTI

## **Abstract**

Serving is the corollary of Christian love for the human being, of solidarity with the others. In fact, the ethics of serving is the ethics of philanthropy and solidarity. Thus, the Orthodox theology accorded a special importance to the correlation between church service and the commentary aspect of the Christian life. Serving represents one of the concrete modalities to extent and deepen the human communion, coming from and having model the divine communion. If our existence in Church has the form of a spiritual communion, serving means to extent this communion into the human sphere and to offer it a concrete reality. The Christian church, a spiritual and social community is vitally interested in developing personal relationships through serving acts. The Christian serving contributes in a real way to the growth process of the human kind to new material and spiritual heights. Serving is also the sign of the devoutness of the Church. In human solidarity, the Church shows its kenotic character, its human face. Kenoza does not represent annihilation, but a condition to enrich the plenitude of existence. Also, asceticism, next to kenoza, does not have as source a feeling of culpability, but a voluntary destruction of individualism, coming from the integral affirmation of the spirit, from the desire to continually fulfil the content of life. Serving is linked to the communion being of the Church, its relationship with the human kind where it was destined to be through Jesus Christ's work. Serving must be seen not just as a historical and pastoral necessity, also co-responsibility to the human aspect the Church was called to in its establishment, mission and destiny. Of course, the Church, integrated into the social organism, is in a dynamic correlation with the historical realities and the human perspectives. Longing to the kingdom of God in its existence, the church encourages the human evolution to new stages of progress and new forms of human relationships that are closer to community.

**Argument.** The Orthodox Church is in its definition a Church of serving in its double aspect: serving God and serving humanity, because serving has community ecclesial aspect into the Christian life. The Christian community is reached as "ecclesia" not only in its witnessing of faith and cult, also in its serving to the world. Serving is, in fact, the

inner characteristic of the Christian and of the Church, in their relationship with the world. In this sense, Orthodoxy does not have a doctrine dedicated to service, but it has the experience of serving, that, if necessary, may be formulated. To highlight the Christian perspective of serving in its dynamism, the Orthodox theology had to analyse a series of fundamental biblical and patristic notions. Looking to answer to the problems raised by the existence of Church into the world, it was necessary to expose its evangelical reasons for serving and its directions. Orthodoxy was always preoccupied to maintain serving into an ideological fundament and into a Christian perspective, because the relationship between Church and the world had and will always have a dialectic characteristic. For the Orthodox Church, serving has no sociological determinants with the aim of keeping Church outside the crises generated by its confrontation with the world; serving is instead a pastoral form that maintains the Church open to humanity, in a way that is adequate to the situation the human kind is passing in its historical evolution.

We are living times when the humans, living inside a pluralist and secular society, are trying to solve their own problems by themselves and with means created by them. They reach solutions that most of the times are unsatisfactory or just temporarily adequate. The Church, more than any other institution, has the duty to involve in solving all the problems of the world. We affirm this idea due to the fact that, no matter the human activity and belonging system (cultural, politic, economic etc.), the human kind is affiliated to the Church of Christ, disregarding the religious group they belong to. We will define the involvement as “unconditional serving of the others”, which could correspond into the laic world with the social assistance system. People, as children of the church and as citizens with all the rights in our country, have the possibility to benefit of the services of The National System of Social Assistance, on one hand, and the services on which the Christian social assistance is founded, on the other hand. The last variant contains the principle that, at the base of the society, there is a solidarity built on the consciousness of fraternity and unconditional love in the name of Christ. Father Dumitru Stăniloae, in his work called *Teologia Dogmatică*, affirms that “Church is the real society, a community self into Christ”, the love communion of people virtually gathered into Christ. This affirmation, together with the entire structure of the social assistance of the Church, is fundamental in Gospel: “*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” (John 13, 34-35).

Mary P. Van Hook, an erudite professor specialized in social assistance to the University of Florida, considers that the biblical commands ensures the base of two approaches reflecting two important characteristics of social assistance: charity and social justice. Charity means to give useful answers to specific crises, without trying to change the social structure that creates and perpetuates sufferance and oppression.

These aspects of charity and philanthropy together with social justice may be depicted in The Old Testament and especially in The New Testament, even in the contemporary life of the Church, as a follow up of these obvious principles, applied in the social mission of the contemporary Church.

On the above mentioned aspects, the theme we chose to present, *Philanthropy and Social Assistance as Missionary Imperative Aspects of The Romanian Orthodoxy*, aims to expose aspects related to the Christian social assistance developed inside the structure of The Romanian Orthodox Church, its strong features and the aspects we consider that need to be adapted to the needs of the contemporary society, perhaps a guide line for the contemporary Romanian Orthodox philanthropy, which may represent a model for other spaces in the Romanian ecclesial territory. We consider that the theme is of significant interest, because the contemporary Romanian society needs increased involvement in social life.

Each Christian religion presents the preoccupation for the social life of the humans, especially those with different types of difficulties. All the Churches respect the Christian virtues and especially charity and love for the others. Due to these two essential virtues, the peoples of the Church involve in the social life, found and sustain various ecclesial hospitals for treating the sick ones and helping those in need.

Related to Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi (The Christian Social and Medical Day-care Centre) Sighișoara, we mention that people are treated and taken care with love and devotion. It is very important to underline the fact that no differentiation is made between the patients from any point of view (religious, ethnic etc.) All the peoples in need are welcomed. We may say that an ecumenical characteristic of Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi appears as obvious. All the people are treated equally, with the same love and respect.

**The Aim of the Thesis.** The present research on the personnel providing social assistance services has **the aim** to underline the need for specialisation and continuous learning of the personnel and also to evaluate the impact of programmes developed inside the community.

The theoretical model of the research is based on the importance of the Christian social assistance process for the social reintegration and the help of people, groups and communities in difficulty, in an unconditional and not discriminatory manner.

The theme has other subsequent purposes: to enrich the quality of the social services offered by Church (through the model of a good example), to extend the social dimension of the Church, to systematically understand the study domain, the use of research methods and techniques in accordance with the specificity of the theme, to conceive and implement an advanced research project, to be a starting line for this type of researches from a sociologic perspective and perhaps to serve to the knowledge those willing to find out more on the social life of the Church in Sighișoara area and more on the social mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

**Premises.** The subject is of actuality and important for the Romanian theology. We wanted to present some aspects related to the old monastery spitals in the Romanian space, because they are not very well known through writing and we consider that the subject will be further developed by other researchers and the beginning of the Orthodox institutionalized philanthropy will come to light for everybody. The beginnings of the Romanian monastery spitals represent the beginning of the Romanian medicine, in the context of those times.

These spitals are the source of the Romanian Orthodox philanthropy. The ecclesial philanthropy is studied nowadays as a beautiful subject, recently rediscovered by the Romanian theology, due to the fact that the communist period forbade this type of activity. It is a good sign that, today, many researchers are preoccupied by the subject, study it and analyse the way appeared and how function the charity institutions of the Romanian Orthodox Church. They have a growing role in the Romanian contemporary society, which is harder and harder confronted with serious problems. It is a good thing that these social institutions of the Church may be presented and popularized, not for vanity, but to present models and encouragement for other people that feel charity, love and other virtues in their soul. The subject is opened to

future research, for determining other aspects and perspectives of this phenomenon belonging to the Romanian Orthodox philanthropy.

**Objectives.** The theme is closely linked to the motivation of choosing it. The rational argumentation of the motivational factors requires an objective analyse of the research. The motives in choosing the theme may be relevant for trying to propose solutions for social problems.

We briefly note some of our reasons for choosing the research theme: the amelioration of the involvement manner, of the methods and techniques used to the service of the others through the evaluation of the activities developed by Centrul Creştin Social-Medical de Zi Sighişoara; the possibility to effectuate field research to one of the most developed and appreciated social services provider at the level of The Romanian Patriarchy; the continuous involvement in the coordination of social assistance activities inside an ecclesial structure, centred on social activities; the elaboration of regulations, centred on evaluating the needs of the beneficiaries (we consider that putting the needs of the beneficiaries in the centre of the activity is a methodological novelty and it is very useful because the needs of the beneficiaries are in continuous change); the lack of a research of this type, operating from a sociological perspective; the need to elaborate a strategy built on the social component.

**The relevance of the theme.** Maintaining objectivity, we may affirm that the theme is **relevant** in a context when the Romanian Orthodox Church elaborated a new organisation and functioning status. The novelty of the statute is that the connection between liberty and responsibility is accentuated and also is the connection between the own autonomy and cooperation with others at a national, regional and eparchial level. The real liberty is not isolation, the unity is not coercion and the hierarchic levels are levels of the ecclesial communion, where primacy is defined as service and enlarged responsibility inside the Synod to maintain the unity of the Church.

According to the Law for the national system of social assistance and to The Statute of The Romanian Orthodox Church, one of the main duties of the social assistance is offer support to groups and communities in difficulty, without any discrimination.

The importance of the theme resides in identifying solutions that lead to the improvement of the life quality for people in difficulty (material, financial, psychic, physical and/or social) in Sighișoara and the near territories by offering social assistance services to the persons in need, without discrimination and unconditionally.

Nominating all the characteristics of the social assistance offered by Church, its instruments and the Christian principle of helping the other in unconditional way is helpful for formulating a general view upon the way the Church involves in the social life and contributes to the community development (Church is one of the main communitarian actors).

**Studying and publishing of ecclesial and official documents.** The Romanian Orthodox Church organizes, in accordance with the important historical milestone of each year, conferences and symposiums dedicate to personalities that are representative for the mission of the Christian Church. Thus, the year 2008 was dedicated to the great hierarch and preacher of the Gospel – Saint John Chrysostom; 2009 was dedicated to Sf. Vasile the Great and to the archbishop of Caesarea Cappadocia, with an important role in the resistance of the Christian principles and also in the social mission of the Church. He was the first hierarch that established asylums and hospitals linked to the churches, to help the poor's and those in needs and he also stimulated the rich ones to use their fortunes to help those less fortunate. Serving for the others is nowadays transformed into Christian social assistance and is built on important Gospel bases. The Church is continuing the philanthropic activity using modern means, adapted to the contemporary society, but maintaining specific characteristics. The Church organizes symposiums on the theme of philanthropy and social assistance, publishes books that debate many aspects. Many volumes of this type were analysed and studied to elaborate the present research theme, together with laic books related to philanthropy and social assistance in the Romanian space.

*Enciclopedia asistenței sociale (The Encyclopaedia of Social Assistance)* edited by the National Association of the Social Assistants in United States affirms that “*the Christian social assistance is different in its worldview and the set of conceptions upon the nature of the human being, upon the world and the aim of the social assistance. These conceptions are the nucleus of the Christian social assistance that transcends a variety of methods, target populations, theoretical aspects and orientations*”.

As a practice activity, the Christian social assistance goes from social advocacy to individual and family treatment, to the administration of children good care, to social assistance for the homeless. It also goes from international development to the cases management. Christian social assistance contains social politics, advocacy, community practice, prevention, and management, therapeutically efforts for individuals, families and vulnerable groups.

We consider the term is illustrative for the philanthropic activity of the Orthodox Church and that practicing a real Christian social assistance is the central point of its social mission. Thus, a clarification of the theoretical aspects of the Christian social assistance and the explanation of its concepts are necessary, along with formulating without any equivocal principles and guide lines in a language that is appropriate to the modern social assistance.

**Related to the influence of our thesis upon the postmodern society and upon The Church**, we consider that our work offers a new principle upon philanthropy and social assistance, laic and religious in the same time. Our research offers a model for the involvement in the social assistance and for serious charity acts. The laic and the ecclesial Romanian society may find in our thesis a model for putting into practice the philanthropic act for those in need and in many difficulties.

Our thesis contains in the practical part important aspects of our research: identifying social assistance activities and actions developed by Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi Sighișoara; their impact on the beneficiaries; implemented programmes and projects; an analyse of the quality and efficiency for the offered services; relationships between the personnel and the beneficiaries (individuals or groups); the degree of involvement of the social partners in the social projects; the environment, the climate for all developed social activities; the attitude of the priests toward social assistance; the social relationships of vulnerable individuals/ groups; behavioural aspects for the social assistance specialists belonging to the Church toward the assisted and the media. We consider that a mediatisation of the social assistance services and acts of the Church is necessary not from vanity but to offer models and a starting point for other persons and institutions.

**The actual phase of the research and the documentation.** We mention that we used a large variation of bibliographical resources: inedited documents, edited documents, many periodicals, general or specialises volumes on the theme, belonging to a large period and dedicated to the theme of philanthropy and social assistance of the Romanian Orthodoxy.

First to be mentioned are the **archivist resources**. A very useful research was conducted at the Archives of Transylvania Mitropoly in Sibiu, where we studied the Archiepiscopal Fund and The Circulation Fund. A useful research was conducted at the National Archives Târgu Mureș, where we studied the Fund of The Romanian Incumbent of Sighișoara. We observed in the documents the way The Orthodox Romanian Church efficiently involved in charity and social assistance activities, activities that are also developed nowadays, but with new resources and opportunities.

We used as bibliography a series of **edited documentary resources**: **Sfânta Scriptură**; **collections of documents**; **dictionaries** as: Raymond Boudon, *Dicționar de sociologie*, Larouss; Ion Bria, *Dicționar de teologie ortodoxă*, București, 1981, 398 p. (reeditat în Olanda în anul 1986 și la București în anul 1994, 428 p.); *Dicționarul explicativ al Limbii Române*, ediția a II-a; Suciuc Coriolan, *Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania*, vol .I-II, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1967; Păcurariu Mircea, *Dicționarul Teologilor Români*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1996; **encyclopaedias**: *Enciclopedia asistenței sociale*, M. P. V. Hook, Christian Social Work, NASW, 1995, CD-ROM; *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Corpus 3, Editeur a Paris; Miller David (coordonator), *Enciclopedia Blackwell a gândirii politice*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2000; *Enciclopedia Britanică*, 16 volume; *Social Work Enciclopedia*, NASW Pres, 1997; **compendiums**: *Compendiu de Doctrină socială a Bisericii*, Editura Sapiența, Iași, 2007; **laws, statutes, protocols, decisions, memoirs, other works of the Holy Fathers**: Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, Sfântul Grigorie de Nazianz, Sfântul Grigorie de Nysa, Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, Sfântul Irineu al Lyonului, Nil Sinaitul.

Ecclesial and laic periodical publications were studied on the theme of our research and also several documents form the archives. The list of **ecclesial periodicals** include: “Telegraful Român”, “Revista Teologică”, “Psihologia”, “Studii Teologice”, “Ortodoxia”, “Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei”, “Mitropolia Ardealului”, “Mitropolia Olteniei”, “Candela”, “Raze de lumină”, “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, “Glasul Bisericii”, “Transilvania”, “Mitropolia Banatului”, “Altarul Banatului”, “Revista Arhivelor”. The authors we cited from this periodicals are: Andrei Bârseanu, Constantin I. Bercuș, G. Brătescu, Orest Bucevschi, T.G. Bulat, Mircea Chialda, Eustochia Ciucanu, Epifanie Cozărescu, B. Duțescu, Marcu Nicolae, E. Gheorghiu, V. Gonța, Al. Gonța, N. Grosu, Mihai Himcinschi, Elena Macavei, Florica Mănoiu, V. Micle, Paul Mihail, Petre Miroiu, Atanasie Negoită, C. Nonea, Grigore Patrulescu, Gherasim Piteșteanul, Irineu Pop,

Teodor Popescu, Romulus Popescu, P. Rezuș, Marin Stamate, Constantin A. Stoide, Vasile Târgovișteanul, Nicolae Vătămanu, Șofron Vlad, C. Voicescu, Nestor Vornicescu and so on.

Many researches approached the theme in general lines or specific lines. We studied Romanian and foreign works. The **Romanian authors** we studied on our theme include: Cristian Bocancea, George Neamțu, Ion Bria, Ruxandra Cesereanu, Ioan Emil Jurcan, V. Miftode, Nicolae Mladin, Maria Molnar, Florin Pașa, Mihaela Luminița Pașa, Ion Petrică, Mircea Păcurariu, Irineu Pop, Marian Preda, Ioan Rămureanu, George Remete, G.I. Soare, Manuela Sofia Stănculescu, Ionica Berevoescu, Dumitru Stăniloae, Florian Tănăsescu, Mihai Valică, Pavel Chirilă, Andreea Băndoiu, Elena Zamfir, Cătălin Zamfir, Gheorghe Banu, Florin Bengean, Valeriu Bologa, Mircea Gelu Buta, Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, Virgil Ciobanu, Nicu Cotlarciuc, Victor Gomoiu, Mihai Himcinschi, M. Iovițu, Elena Macavei, F. Mănoiu, David Pestroiu, Antonie Plămădeală, Ioan Pop, Paul Pruteanu, Ovidiu Soare, Vasile Someșanul, Mihail Teodorescu, Mihai Vizitiu and many others.

The **foreign** works studied for our research have as **authors**: Robert L. Barker, Ch. Bachmann, J. Simonin, R. Blum, B. Brunhes, M. Foucault, R. Lenoir, P. Rosanvallon, S. Crapuchet, C. De Robertis, H. Pascal, Karl Christian Felmy, L. Fevre, J. Fournier, H. Hatzfeld, D. Howe, C.S. Levy, A. Menthonnex, Andreas Muller, E. Rubington, Hierotheos Vlachos, C. Chevreuse, V. Coulshed, F. Demier, G. Dorion, Madeleine Grawitz, M. Laroque, M. Marshall, T. Parsons, Helen Perlman, M. Rustant, Jeanine Verdes-Leroux, M. Vingre, B. Wootoon, Rene Bornert, Olivier Clement, Demetrios Constantelos, Thomas Spidlik, Kallistos Ware and so on. We presented here only the most important aspects of our bibliography.

**General aspects of the thesis.** The preoccupation of the Church for the social life of its believers and the aspirations of the human kind is obvious. Although the essential mission of the Church is the deliverance, it was always preoccupied by the laic problems of the people, because a Christian walks to deliverance and grows as a person in its acts toward the fellow creatures. The Church was always by the side of its believers, helping with the necessity of the laic life when necessary, helping in the case of catastrophes, supporting the poor youth for studying, managing charity organizations for the welfare of the poor, being always close to the nation in the historical events from the Romanian space.

The thesis opens with **Introducerea (Introduction)** that present the argument, the objectives and the purpose of the thesis, the relevance of the theme, the cross disciplinary approach of it, the actual stage of the research and the bibliography, also methodological aspects and the structure of the thesis.

The first chapter is entitled ***Dimensiunea socială a misiunii Bisericii (The Social Dimension of The Church Mission)***. Upon the moral and social mission of the Church, we affirm that this is to spread the principles of Christian moral and deepen them into the consciousness and the soul of the believers in order to determine them to live the Christian teachings. Our Church has the conviction and the experience of, based on its moral principles, transforming the Christians into better citizens of the divine and the laic world. The Saviour says: “My Kingdom is not in this world”, but it is for this world, because He sacrificed Himself for this world. Christianity, in its dogmatic and moral doctrine, offers to the believers the needing elements to satisfy the need for truth, good and beauty, to explain the meaning of life, to organize and guide experiences. Christian guiding is an attribute of the Church. Following Christ example, the Church starts its mission from each individual. A new Christian life, its moral and social imperatives, the affirmation of human rights and the moral consciousness should start with the inner transformation of the individual, the adornment of his soul. “Confess your sins!” says Christ at the beginning of His activity. Refusing the sins and the dangerous temptations, sinking the soul in the light of the virtues are the starting points in the moral actions of the Church. Without a real atonement, without the discipline of the inner life, nothing can be achieved. The believer must tend to perfection.

The second chapter is entitled ***Elemente de filantropie și asistență socială (Philanthropy and Social Assistance Elements)***. For the love of humans, during time, was built the philanthropic work in charitable acts and deeds, encouraging, supporting and bringing to light talents, through sponsorship and creation acts. Philanthropy may be considered the entire philosophic, theological, artistic, scientific and technical creation. Love toward the human being is concretized in charity philanthropy and cultural philanthropy. It is the concrete aspect of consciousness for the human kind. The supreme philanthropic model is God, the creator of the world. God created the world for Him to become Human and the human to become God through grace. Social assistance is a reality as old as the history of humanity, at least for two reasons: first, all collectivities are compound from individuals that, for genetic, natural and social reasons, were in the impossibility of satisfying their needs with their own means; second, no civilisation totally lacks the concern

for its members in need. Poverties, disabilities, orphans and abandoned children, sick old people or without any family are problems as old as the world and the human kind tried to solve them using different structures and internal mechanisms, some spontaneous, some institutionalized. The apparition of a profession centred on “treating social maladies” in a scientific and systematic way in relative recent: the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witness the creation of the national systems for social assistance and the construction of professional identity for social assistants. After the apparition of Christianity, for 2,000 years, the charge if individuals, groups and communities in trouble was exclusively the preoccupation of the Church and the state laic structures involved at all in social domain, excepting the oppressive measures. From the dawn of Christianity until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social assistance practiced by the religious institutions and orders was the main support for the poor and the other disadvantaged groups.

Celebrating divine Philanthropy requires practicing social philanthropy because the blessing of entering the divine kingdom is given to those that fed and dressed the poor, consulted the sick ones and the imprisoned ones. Holy Gospel is the celebration of divine Philanthropy and the social philanthropy is an irradiation of the Holy Gospel into the social life, into the world, as Christ says: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 5, 16). The Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers of the Church united Eucharist with the social philanthropy of brotherhood, of organizing collections to help poor, widows, orphans and old men, as is written by Holy Apostle Paul and Holy Evangelist Luca.

The third chapter is entitled ***Concretizarea liturghiei sociale în gândirea și practica Sfântului Vasile cel Mare și a Sfântului Ioan Gură de Aur (Concrete Social Liturgy in The Thinking and Practice of Saint Vasile the Great and Saint John Chrysostom)***. The Holy Fathers of The Church continued the apostolic practice of philanthropy and social service inspired by the Gospel and Liturgy, extended it and organized it in permanent structures and institutions. Eloquent examples are to be found in the 4<sup>th</sup> century: Saint Vasile the Great organized charity institutions for poor, sick or orphans. Saint John Chrysostom became the advocate of the poor and preached Christ present not only in The Mystery of The Saint Altar, the Eucharist, but also in the “Mystery of The Brother”, our fellow creatures needing our help.

The care for the poor, the help for those in need, the relief for the sick, and the betterment of those born with disabilities were permanent concerns of Saint Vasile the Great. As a young man, he gave his fortune to the poor; as priest,

he fed the hungry people during the complete drought and starvation during the year of 368; as archbishop, enlarged his philanthropic activities, giving orders to the bishops in his eparchy to build permanent philanthropic institutions and asking to the rulers to have a single type of behaviour: love and charity for those in need. He also created in Caesarea a philanthropic complex with church, hospitals, lazarets, asylums for the old people, houses for strangers and all the necessary buildings that the above enumerated institutions to function properly: kitchens, all sort of tool houses and annexes, schools for the children and for learning crafts. Thus, the saint created near Caesarea another city the people called after the name of its founder, Vasiliada. Saint Vasile was for everybody a law of virtue above the body even from his life on earth; he apotheosized virtue and banished vice; he was a good storyteller and knew how to educate the others even using jokes to do it; he blamed with clemency, but did not transformed clemency into savageness and indulgence into weakness; he was much more intelligent and eloquent than the people of his time; he freed himself from himself to be able to receive The Holy Spirit in interpreting The Gospel, in discovering the holy elements and finding the most adequate words for the ideas. The beauty of the saint resided in his virtue, his greatness was in his speech upon God, and his road was a continuous advancement. Climbing several stairs, his life was a road to heaven, the reward for an accomplished life.

Saint John Chrysostom was the greatest Christian orator of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps of all times. The art of his oratory is unfolding elegant and precious like the folds of a celebration vestment. The richness, the diversity and the brightness of the colours together with the exceptional talent for telling the morals of his époque are incomparable until today. The social exhortation is very important for the Christian eloquence because its themes treat in all their complexity the various forms and morals of the social life. Saint John Chrysostom was preoccupied all the time by the central mystery of deliverance, The Holy Liturgy, mirrored in the society. Tradition attributes to this saint the paternity of several Eastern liturgies but there is no special work of him dedicated to it. Still, there are plenty of precious fragments explaining the liturgical moments, acts and texts. They are cited and used especially in exegetic and catechetic works.

The fourth chapter of the thesis is entitled *Spitalul creștin ca formă și manifestare a misiunii filantropice ortodoxe românești (The Christian Hospital as Form and Manifestation of the Romanian Orthodox Philanthropic Mission)*. Living their life in the middle of the people they served for deliverance, the priests understood to be present in

all the difficult times of the Romanian people, supporting and helping in the desiderate for a free and just life. Keeping “the ancestral law” of the Christian faith, the Romanian clergy maintained awake and developed the consciousness of national unity. Identifying themselves with the laics – not very different in speech, vestment and level of living – the clergy from the Romanian Church transformed themselves in “everything for everyone”. They were teachers for children, doctors for sick, judges for those arguing, defenders for the rights of the abused, fighters and guides in the fight for the justice of the nation, when grievances were so big that made the people revolt. The church had a remarkable role in maintaining the continuity of the nation, the existence of a Church for a free, independent and autonomous country, with its own laws, sermons and traditions. This church has the source in the will of the Romanian nation for freeing itself from the social, national and religious restraints and developing for a free national will and a better destiny. The dearest thing for a nation is liberty and the dearest thing for the Romanian Church is its independence.

The Romanian Orthodox Church across the country, in all times, supported in various forms the population: financially in cases of floods, arsons, hails and other calamities when the residences were destroyed in totality. In a fraternal solidarity, the Church and its sons did not wait and intervened to support those living the same faith in the entire nation. Charity is one of the most important virtues for Christians and charity must come from the heart and be filled with love and devoutness. Many widows of priests and teachers and simple people were helped financially or with a residence. Many young wives of the priests were widows before the time and had children and no place to stay. Following the example of the Christian religion, based on loving the others and putting the people above the material goods, the Church understood the truth that the human being, possessing a superior understanding, has the mission and the duty of helping the others: weak and incapable, disadvantaged and without support, poor and left alone.

Related to health issues, the Romanian Orthodox Church founded the first hospitals in Romania. The first hospitals in Moldavia were founded by the metropolitan Anastasie Crinca at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: a hospital in Suceava, the city destined for the metropolitan residence and another at Dragomirna Monastery. The first hospital was destined to help “the poor in Târgul Suceava”, meaning free medical assistance. The second hospital was for monks. The research conducted in Țara Românească discovered a hospital at Vodița Monastery, perhaps the oldest Romanian

monastery. A donation letter from 1542 shows that a hospital existed in Simidreni, and one in Argeş, in front of the monastery imitating the byzantine construction of this type. Both spitals were supported by Argeş Mitropoly.

One of the most famous hospitals from Țara Românească continued its existence until today, Colțea hospital in Bucharest. The sword bearer Mihai Cantacuzino founded there in 1695-1714 a hospital and a monastery replacing the small wood church built by the lord steward Colțea. The hospital is not independent, but linked to the monastery and the monks were the first medical assistants and doctors. Near the hospital and the monastery, a school is built for Romanian and Slavonic. N. Vătămianu believes that the titular saint of The Holy Trinity given to the monastery is a reference to the three institutions built there.

Pantelimon hospital in Bucharest, a well-known hospital was also founded near a monastery, Pantelimon monastery, built between 1735 and 1750 by Grigore The Second Ghica Voievod.

The things are similar in Moldova. The largest hospital, Spiridonia of Iași, is founded near Saint Spiridon monastery between 1753 and 1755. All the hospitals, in both Romanian provinces, had departments for critical diseases, like lues. In his time, Vasile the Great developed in Vasiliada a department for leprosy. Until contemporary times, Saint Spiridon hospital was managed by the Moldavian Mitropoly. Another hospital, in Roman, is built by the Father Superior Gherasim Putneanul and another hospital is built in Bârlad by the hermit Sofronie Vârnav. A hospital also functioned near the monastery Saint Prophet Samuil of Focșani, succursal monastery to Saint Spiridon of Iași. Well known hospitals existed also at the monasteries in Neamț, Slatina, and Tărăța etc. We consider as relevant two letters of two Eastern Patriarchs, one mentioning Colțea hospital, the other mentioning Saint Spiridon hospital. In 1715, the Patriarch from Alexandria wrote about Colțea that it is a unique construction, where the monastery, the hospital, the cantina for the poor and the school are linked to each other to the glory of God. In 1763, the Patriarch Samuel of Constantinople wrote about Spiridonie that it is a location for “the service of the sick”. Soon after the beginning of the second World War, the pulled down hospital Saint Spiridon was rebuilt among others by the Father Superior of Saint Spiridon monastery and vicar of Moldavian mitropoly, The archbishop Justinian, the future Patriarch of Romania. At the bicentenary of the hospital, in 1957, the Patriarch Justinian read an address in Iași, highlighting the serving mission of the Church for the nation and the individuals, according to our Lord commands.

The establishment of The Romanian Orthodox Orphanage in Sibiu is another important aspect for the involvement of the Church in charity acts.

All the hospitals mentioned above offered free support and medical assistance, welcoming especially the poor people, without the possibility of benefitting of house consultations and treatment. The medical and auxiliary personnel were paid from the incomes of the monasteries. For this reason, we consider that the Church conducted an important philanthropic activity.

Later the hospitals entered into the national social assistance system, being supported by the state. The Church organizes an internal social assistance for priests, monks, sick and old, for young widows of priests without any family in monasteries as Mănăstirea Căldărușani, Mănăstirea Viforâta, Mănăstirea Slatina or Mănăstirea Neamț. The fact that the state took the former duties of the Church is just a reason for the Church to develop other serving acts related to its mission. The Church is always present and intervenes where its support is solicited, today like during the history, too. The Church built schools, because they were inexistent and hospitals because the state could not support hospitals. The Romanian Orthodox Church was always present and active when needed for serving the people, following the traditional activities of serving ad practiced in the byzantine world and also in the western Christianity.

We underline the idea that all these Christian hospitals are based on solidarity and a profound love for the people, for the fellow humans in difficulty.

The fifth chapter is entitled *Suferința umană și mijloacele de anihilare a acesteia (The Human Suffering and Modalities for Its Annihilation)*. Suffering caused by ignorance, disease, poverty, loneliness and death are the essence of the human condition fallen into sin, estranged from God, from the Life Source by Adam's and his heirs disobedience. Pain is the physiologic result of traumas caused by the deviation from the road given through the act of creation and death is the result of the estrangement from God. Corruptibility of the human nature and of the individuals, as death, are not wanted by God, even if sometimes appear as punishment from God for the sin, for breaking the commands. These stages are not meant to be permanent. The pain produced by sin is changed by God through redemption (the inner change, the return to God) in ways to fight and conquer the sin. Death itself is turned by God against immorality and its cause, the sin and the destruction of the sin is important for the harm not to be permanent and without death.

According to the theological knowledge, the entire creation is destined to reach transfiguration, a renewal through Church in the kingdom of God. This is the fundamental truth on the road of our life to be convinced of, so our efforts and work not to be in vain. With the embodiment of our Saviour and the establishment of the Church, the holy work of deliverance started and the human being was restored through the Son of God, Saviour Jesus Christ.

Church exist into the world and, through its establishment, mission and scope, it is in an existential and organic solidarity with the world. The Orthodox Christian vision upon the report between the Church and the world starts from the premise of the world being the gift of love made by God. The world is the fallen human kind, which through personal transformation and cooperation with God, in Church and with the Church, must reach from anthropocentrism to theocentrism. “God made Himself Man to deify the man”. This is the message and the aim of the Church into the world. The acceptance of this message into the private plan of life means to receive light, fulfilment and joy in all the aspects of the life. The closeness to God through faith enriches the gift and the power of life.

Faith, assumed and lived in the Holy church, the “pillar and ground of Truth” (1 Timothy 3,15), is for every believer the spring of divine grace, of renewal of body and soul, the passing from immorality to morality until the participation to the holy being. Faith inherited as gift from The Holy Spirit, in The Holy Mystery of Christening, must be always supported through: spiritual life and commitment to the Church, in a continuous relation with The Holy Gospel and The Holy Tradition, the sources of divine Revelation, the Holy Mysteries in which the Church transmits divine energy, grace, power of God for the renewal of body and soul (Confession, Eucharist and Holy Oil); participating to the service, especially to Liturgy; the exercise of praying and abstinence; the spiritual and alimentary fasting; honouring the saints and the holy remains, honouring the icons of Christ and of Virgin Mary, of the angels and of all saints. All these acts of faith are given by the Holy Church as a gift and may be for every sick people a source of health and enrichment of the present life and the afterlife.

Living the faith, anywhere and in all circumstances of life, is a source for the health of the body and the soul. Estrangement from God and faithlessness always was and remains the source of troubles and sufferings. “Troubles come, says the Patheric, because we are proud when God spares us”. Human vanity generated during history the estrangement

from knowledge and faithful work, from Orthodoxy and its practice to the dark area of deviance from knowledge that always generates sufferings.

An important role in treating the human sufferings has the Christian medicine. The Christian medicine is an ecclesial medicine. The medical act, finding the disease, identifying biological and spiritual causes for disease, the evolution and the prognostic, the prophylaxis and the treatment, all of them are performed in Church, having as base the Christian dogma and morals. Christ is The Absolute Healer which makes possible all the healings. To ensure the spiritual and physical health, each Christian need a therapy through faith, conducted inside the Christian Church.

The sixth chapter is entitled *Analiză socio-psihologică asupra suferinței în cadrul relațiilor interumane (A Socio-psychological Analyse Upon Suffering Inside The Human Relationships)*. Conducting a sociological research, we observed that the statistical analyses show a significant connection between the activities supported by Centrul creștin medical-social Sighișoara and the level of welfare of the old people benefiting of the social services. Even if the scientific methodology does not permit causal conclusions, rather correlations, it is obvious that many of the services offered by the Centre are positively correlated with the state of wellbeing of the beneficiaries, offering not just specialised services, but also connected services with impact on the quality of life. Of course, not all services have equal impact and not all services have a positive significant impact, but we may conclude, without any risk, that overall the activity of Centrul creștin medical-social Sighișoara are benefice for the psychological equilibrium of the beneficiaries and that there are specific domains we need to insist in activities in the future, as the social cantina, various conciliation services and medical assistance.

The present research has as final part: *Concluzii generale (General Conclusions), Bibliography and Annexes, with a presentation of the Foundation - Centrul Creștin Social Medical de Zi Sighișoara and a presentation of the Project: Centrul Creștin Social Medical de Zi Sighișoara*, with all the documents for his establishment, regulations and services at European standards. We also presented some *images* for highlighting the dimension of the charity act. The images are extremely eloquent and witness the wonderful charity acts developed with love in this ecclesial social institution.

Our thesis intends to highlight once again the way the Romanian Orthodox Church always was and still is involved in charity acts. The Romanian Orthodox Philanthropy has its source in the philanthropic and social assistance acts of our Church during the history. We wanted to underline the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church develops an institutionalized philanthropy, has its own institutions of social assistance, anchored into the contemporary European realities and a special mission dedicated to all those in difficulties. A special attention was paid to Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi Sighișoara. Even if the scientific methodology does not permit causal conclusions, rather correlations, it is obvious that many of the services offered by the Centre are positively correlated with the state of wellbeing of the beneficiaries, offering not just specialised services, but also connected services with impact on the quality of life. Of course, not all services have equal impact and not all services have a positive significant impact, but we may conclude, without any risk, that overall the activity of Centrul creștin medical-social Sighișoara are benefice for the psychological equilibrium of the beneficiaries and that there are specific domains we need to insist in activities in the future, as the social cantina, various conciliation services and medical assistance.

We may conclude that Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi Sighișoara develops a holy work, honouring our Holy Church and all Christians, regardless their confession, which, by the command of God, we have the duty to serve, offering the necessities for a decent life at the age of senescence. The impact is a strong one, offering a connection for the citizens of the city, many of them offering aliments, clothes and money, with love, benevolence and with the certitude that their help reach those in need.

Every time an organisational analyse is performed, the results lead to a gradual change inside the institution, mobilize or demotivate the personnel, represent the satisfaction or the dissatisfaction for those activating in the name of common objectives. Disregarding the periodicity of the evaluation. The institutional introspection or “the internal and external radiography” of an institution, it will produce new results, will answer to problems older or newer for the will of action of serving the others, an action we all need to perform and respond for. Serving the others is part of standards contributing to the social welfare and the fulfilment of human desiderates, but is also quantified by Jesus Christ and will be a reward or a punishment for each “child of God”. We may affirm that every deed that is philanthropy and social assistance in the same time may be the subject of sociological analyse and theological analyse in the same time.

Presenting the social activity from the above mentioned institution, in a scientific manner, underline the complementarity report between Church and State in the domain of the social assistance to a micro and macro institutional level; the intense philanthropic work and the permanent and priority preoccupation of the ecclesial institutions for the involvement in various and always new problems of the human society, composed by its spiritual sons and daughters, no matter the religion, the social statute and other differences.

Being involved in coordinating the social assistance of the institution, we intended to analyse in a professional manner the strong points and the weak points in our missionary activity inside the Romanian Orthodox Church; the lack of documentation for the functioning of the Christian social assistance system; the permanent need for adaptation of those offering services of ecclesial social assistance to the problems of the contemporary society. The results of the research may be a starting point for The Romanian Patriarchy to elaborate a development strategy for the domain of the social assistance.

Analysing and measuring the impact of social assistance activities on the beneficiaries and on other members of the community, was the possibility to obtain a specific measurable answer for: the need of continuous formation of the personnel ensuring ecclesial social assistance at all levels (the need for a social assistant hired in each parish remain obvious and could ensure the quality of social acts in the parish and resolve in the same time the problem of the ecclesial social assistants); bettering and diversifying the fundraising methods to ensure the sustainability of social services offered by national and European financed programmes and projects; the efficacy of the partnerships between “State and Church” and their transition to regional and local levels.

The existence of a social centre respects all the Romanian legislation and also the love for the fellow people expressed in a concrete manner through deeds, after the example of Christ. It reaches unique objectives at the national level and is a pioneer in the domain, putting The Romanian Orthodox Archpries Domain of Sighișoara in a well-known and appreciated position among those offering social services.

Volunteering is very important in the activities and helps reaching many social objectives of the Church, reveals the fact the ecclesial institution had a well-organized social service system even from its beginnings, a system that is

identified with its being, from ancient times when volunteering was just a form of serving and not a legislated activity, defined in theories related to voluntary work in general.

Presenting the activities of social assistance developed by the Romanian Orthodoxy and the implication of ecclesial charity institutions comes as a response to some negative opinions sustaining the lack of opening of the religious cults to the problems of social assistance and also their lack of competences. The credit given by the state to the ecclesial social services contravenes that the nature of the religious cults is an impediment in according neutral and competent assistance to vulnerable groups and individuals. The idea that “the clergy of any type does not have specialized studies to intervene in specific domains and uses invalid methods and ideas, not given credit by the medical and scientific world” is being opposed by the fact the services we offer are practiced by specialised personnel, all the social assistance services are offered by licensed personnel, many of them with a MA degree or other type of post academic studies in the domain.

The research also highlighted the following aspects: the need for consolidating the relationship with the public institutions with the same activity domain; ameliorating the communication with the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the social assistance services; the need for the growth of salaries to diminish or even stop the fluctuation of personnel; the consolidation of the visible team, especially in the hard times of any organisation in order to inspire other institutions; the need to enlarge the types and the area of social assistance activities.

The thesis, in general lines, completes the existent studies in the domain, indicates a strategic dimension for the social mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church, discovers people, deeds and contexts linked to the social missionary life of the Romanian Orthodoxy through history. Even existing from thousands of years in a structure that is not juridical crystallized, the ecclesial social assistance is a relatively new in an empiric manner. This is why we consider that a research on the theme, with a practical example of an institution of Romanian Orthodox Church, is relevant.

We consider the thesis also a feedback for all those working hard in the social structures of the Church, as hired personnel or volunteering, members of NGO functioning under the patronage of the Church, it is our encouragement for a way of gaining knowledge, for those “using their life for their friends”. It is a new starting point for the internal reorganisation of the ecclesial social institutions and a material for those searching information on the theme.

We are conscious that the subject is not exhausted in our research in all aspects related to the Romanian Orthodox philanthropy, because the subject is very vast, requires more researchers, but, in its strong and weak aspects, the present work brings a contribution in highlighting the way the Romanian Orthodox Church takes care of people from social, philanthropic and material points of view, not only from a spiritual point of view.

The general conclusion of the presented material is obvious: the clergy was and remains close to the people and the nation, close to the believers in all the difficult times during history. The Church always supported human aspirations and dreams for a better life, fought that for the people to have all the necessities for a decent life. Centrul Creștin Social-Medical de Zi Sighișoara is an eloquent example that requires to be multiplied in the hard contemporary times we are living.

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