A new decade for social changes
Models of Christian social work

Chirugu Gianina, Petrov George Daniel
Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania

chirugu.gianina@yahoo.com

Abstract. The purpose of this work is to present the forms of manifestation of Romanian Christian social assistance both in Orthodoxy and in Catholicism. Thus were pursued the fulfillment of objectives such as: Identification of theoretical considerations of the term philanthropy, the importance of philanthropy for the Romanian Orthodox Church from ancient times to the present, highlighting the forms of philanthropy in the Catholic Church, multidimensional comparative analysis of the concept of philanthropy in both the romanian and catholic orthodox churches, improvement of the way of involvement, methods and techniques used in the service of neighbor and active involvement in the coordination of church social assistance activities, centered on social activity. The contribution of the present research, carried out on the philanthropic phenomenon of the Church, on the one hand, aims to ascertain the need for specialization and continuous training and, on the other hand, to assess the impact of projects and programs carried out in communities, on the beneficiaries.

Keywords. Christianty, social, work, philantropy, charity

1. Introduction

In the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, the word philanthropy denotes a charitable action undertaken for the benefit of the needy. The definition points out that philanthropy is done to help the poor, who are always with us and in need of help. God is a lover of men, and man is called to imitate the philanthropy of God. Jesus was an example of this philanthropy, he opened up a personal, living, concrete, practical example of love for a person. Together with God’s love for people, the love of people among them leads to the realization of God’s Kingdom, which is love.

A scriptural synonym of philanthropy is deaconia or service of the later neighbor, by French means another term was introduced, that of charity [1]. The service of one’s neighbor is the corollary of Christian love for man, of a sense of solidarity with others. In fact, the ethics of service is an ethic of philanthropy and solidarity, and for this reason Orthodox theology attaches great importance to the correlation between service and the common aspect of Christian life. Service is one of the specific ways in which human communication expands and deepens, which has its source and pattern in divine communication. If our existence in the Church acquires forms of spiritual communication, then through ministry we spread this communication in the human sphere and give it a concrete reality.
The Christian Church, which is a spiritual and social community, is extremely interested in developing personal relationships through acts of service. Because Christian service really promotes the process of human growth to new material and spiritual heights. The priest is obliged to initiate philanthropic and social activities and to organize Christian philanthropy at the parish level.

Service is also a sign of the humility of the Church. Through acts of human solidarity, the Church enables her to see her scientific aspect, her human face. Chenosis is not an animation, but a condition of growth throughout existence. Ascesis, which should accompany Chenosis, does not come from a feeling of guilt, but from the voluntary destruction of egoism, from all the affirmation of the spirit, from the aspiration to the continuous fulfillment of the content of life. The ministry belongs to the very existence of the Church, to its relations with humanity in which the work of Christ belonged. Therefore, service must be considered not only as a historical, pastoral necessity, but also as a co-responsibility toward the humanity to which the Church has been called by its very foundation, mission and fate. Of course, the Church, being integrated into the social organism, is in a dynamic correlation with historical realities, with the perspectives of human life in general. By its nature, which tends toward the Kingdom of God, the Church supports the evolution of humanity toward new stages of progress and toward new forms of human relations, a closer community.

In every Christian religion there is concern for the social life of our fellow men, those in a state of difficulty. Of course, the Church has embodied all Christian virtues and, above all, mercy and love for others. Because of these two essential virtues, the people of the Church are involved in the social field, establish and support different church institutions in which to treat the sick, those in different States of helplessness.

The moral and social mission of the Church is to spread Christian moral principles, in deepening the conscience of the faithful, in order to make them adopt moral standards as landmarks in life. Our Church has the conviction and experience that, on the basis of her moral principles, she can make them good faithful citizens in the divine Kingdom and in the earthly state.

Christianity, through dogmatic and moral doctrine, really makes available to faithful concepts and principles to quench its thirst for truth, for good and for beauty, to explain the purpose of its life and of the world, to guide and organize its existence. This Christian guidance, as I have said, returns to the Church and, following the example of the Savior, continues to fulfill this mission from the human individual. The new life, the Christian life, with its true moral and social requirements, with the affirmation of the natural rights of man, with the conscience of the moral conscience, must begin with the internal change of man, with the beauty of his inner soul.

2. Philanthropy in Orthodoxy

The Holy fathers of the Church continued the apostolic practice of philanthropy or social service inspired by the Gospel and the masses, then extended philanthropic or charitable activities and organized them into permanent structures or institutions.

Examples of this can be found in the 4 century: Saint Basil the Great, who founded charities for the poor, the sick, orphans, etc., John Zlatoust, Those defenders of the poor have become and have believed in Christ; he is mysteriously present not only in the secret of the holy altar, that is, in the Eucharist, but also in the “great secret”, that is, in our neighbor, who needs help. Helping those in need, alleviating suffering for the sick, and improving the lives of those who suffer from birth and unfortunate circumstances, has been the constant care of St. Basil.
throughout his life; as a young man, he shared his wealth with the orphans of destiny. As a priest, in 368 he gave food to the starving population during severe drought and famine, and as a bishop he expanded his philanthropic activities. On the one hand, giving his bishop the opportunity to establish permanent philanthropic structures in his diocese and to ask the leaders of the people to behave in the same way; Love and generosity in relation to unhappiness, and on the other hand it has created a great philanthropic complex in the vicinity of Caesarea, including: The Church, the hospital, leprosy, the nursing home, the houses for foreigners, added to these are the buildings necessary to meet the needs of all these facilities: Kitchens, workshops of all kinds and other necessary dependencies, there was no shortage of schools where children learned books or schools for learning crafts.

Thus, St. Basil the Great created in the vicinity of Caesarea another city, through which people are called by the name of its founder: Vasiliada. St. Basil was, therefore, for all a kind of law of virtue, and he was over the flesh, even before he moved out of this life, he glorified virtue and hastened vice, he had charm in telling stories, and he knew how to train others even when he was joking, he rebuked with caution, but he bore no kindness to rest, or indulgence to weakness, intelligence and eloquence behind all men, He purified himself to receive the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture, to seek out divine things, and to find words that correspond exactly to ideas. In a word, the beauty of the Basilica was virtue, his greatness was the speech of God, his continuous walk, which by gradual exaltation raised him to God, the Basilica – all his life was but an ascent to heaven, which proved to be a perfect man in a perfect life.

Saint John Chron was indeed the greatest Christian orator of the fourth century and, we can say, all the time. The art of his speech is put elegantly and pompously like the fold of a festive garment, and the richness, variety and brilliance of colors, as well as the exceptional talent with which he paints the customs of his age, are, to this day, an unparalleling model. Social preaching is of particular importance to Christian eloquence, because the various forms and customs of social life are treated in all their complexity.

Saint John Chrysostom considers both the poor and the rich his sons. In addition, St. John Chrysostom was concerned with the time of the central mystery in the economy of salvation, the divine liturgy, also reflected in the social spectrum of St. John Chrysostom as a tradition of attributing to the fatherland several Eastern liturgies, He did not leave a special work dedicated to the high consecration of the divine Liturgy. Instead, we from St. John Chrysostom have a lot of valuable fragments, where he explains various liturgical moments, actions and texts, quotes and used in his complex work, especially in exegetical and catetic works.

3. Charity in Catholicism

Man, in his depth, is a social being. In heaven as on earth, he is dependent on communion and community, and the task of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel, that is, the salvation and redemption of Christ, through the communication of divine life to men. In the current context when the social worker is called to exercise his profession freely and personally, he can act and make mature decisions for the benefit of disadvantaged people with an openness and understanding in favor of life, in its depth. Here life appears as a gift received from God. Viewed as a gift from God, to find the right solutions for solving cases, both easy and difficult, the social worker can always call charity. Virtue is a common state of the soul that causes us to do good and avoid evil. Christian virtue is the custom, by steadfast perseverance, to fulfill the whole moral law of pure love for God and neighbor through the grace of the Creator. In other words, virtue is the food of the soul. Virtue stifles man’s evil impulses, opens the way of temptation, frees the Christian from sin, and plants in his soul the good that gives peace, satisfaction and
confidence in the way that leads to salvation. As a function of the internal pursuit of the good, virtue would be but one, but since the needs of human life and the relations between men manifest themselves in various forms, it is natural that virtue, as a guide to all human life, should take many forms and thus speak of many virtues, but we will focus only on the theological virtues: faith, hope and love.

Charity as a supernatural means placed at our disposal by God does not in any way destroy our nature of being workers for the good of others, but complement it by allowing it to pursue new goals designed to build man’s will and thought by God. That there is no political and economic stability, the social worker is determined to concentrate so much that his work will bear fruit not only in the short term, but also to consider the integration of the assistant as a whole. From the Vatican the Church’s discourse becomes more insipid and it is emphasized on several occasions that economies and policies are globalized and that distances between people are distant and, therefore, charitable activities and activities must embrace all people and all needs. If there are people who are deprived of food and drink, clothes, housing, medicine, work, education, the means of living a real human life, tormented by accident and illness, by suffering in exile or in prisons, where Christian charity must seek and care for them, comfort them with generous care and comfort them with generous help. The Council, a new time of Pentecost, shows the absolute role played by the Holy Spirit in the history of salvation, because the mission of the Church is to lead people to Christ.

The Church tries to answer the question: What does the Church think of a person? What can be recommended to build today’s society? What is the ultimate significance of human activity in the universe? An answer to these questions is sought: God, who has a fatherly care for all, desired that all men should form a family and be fraternal among themselves. The conciliatory fathers seek to respond to the challenges of the world, to restore human dignity when atheism denies this dignity, and to propose the building of a human society in the light of revelation, salvation for the human person and the restoration of human society.

Faced with the development of the world and the profound questions that people continue to ask today, as they did yesterday, the Church presents her answer to the faith she received from her Master, which is the key, the center and the goal of all human history. The Church confirms that there are, first of all, many things that are not changed and have their final foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

4. Comparative analysis of good philanthropic practice models

In order to demonstrate the importance of philanthropy in the Christian Church, we will focus on the method of documentary analysis and comparative analysis, analyzing the most important non-profit organizations of the Romanian Orthodox Church the Federation of philanthropy and the Caritas Federation of the Catholic Church. Given that our country is one of the most religious in Europe [2]. The social-philanthropic work of our Church is carried out both through specialized sectors and through associations and foundations. Since 2000, the legislation has become more and more favorable to NGOs, social partnerships with public authorities assimilated to the non-governmental sector, the Romanian Orthodox Church does not have a significant representativeness in this respect, which is assimilated by potential public partners to a public institution with a specific religious character. The context in which another direction of social activity of the Orthodox Church has emerged is complemented by the existence of non-governmental organizations of other denominations, which had a long tradition in other European countries and which initiated the process of opening up as a social partner in the Romanian space. This is especially true for the Roman Catholic Caritas
Confederation and Evangelical Diakonia organizations. Orthodox organizations emerged sporadically, but were only local and sometimes diocesan initiatives.

According to the important historical landmarks of each year, the Romanian Orthodox Church organizes conferences and symposiums dedicated to different personalities of the mission of building a Christian church. Thus, in 2008, Saint John Chrysostom was consecrated to the great hierarch, the liturgy and the preacher – Saint John Chrysostom, and in 2009 the year of Basil the Great was the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which decided to develop the personality of the Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, which had a special role in the seething of Christianity, especially in the social mission. He is the first hierarch who, apart from the Church, helps the poor and the powerless, urges the rich to use their wealth, to help the needy and those in need. The fact is that this neighborhood ministry, which is now part of the concept of Christian philanthropy, has important biblical foundations. If so far known philanthropic saints have been commemorated, the Romanian Orthodox Church has dedicated 2020 as a commemorative year of Romanian Orthodox philanthropists.

The Church continues her philanthropic activities today, using modern means adapted to today’s society, but preserving its own specificity. The Church organizes symposiums on philanthropy and social work and also publishes volumes in which these issues are widely debated by specialists. This is a good way to get a better result. In fact, various volumes of secular publications on philanthropy and social support in the Romanian space will also be studied. From the Encyclopedia of Social work, published under the auspices of the national society of Social workers in the United States, we learn that Christian social work is characterized by a fundamental picture of the world and a set of conceptions about the nature of man, the world, the purpose of social work.

In practice, Christian social work extends from social promotion to individual and family treatment, from child welfare management to family support services, and from international development to case management. Thus, Christian social assistance includes social policies, advocacy, Community practices, prevention, administration and reparative (therapeutic) efforts with vulnerable people, families and groups. We believe that this term is an example of the philanthropic activity of the Orthodox Church and that the realization of true Christian social assistance should be a disaccomplishment of its social mission. This requires clarification of the theoretical framework for Christian social work, an explanation of its concepts and unambiguous formulation of principles and guidelines for practice, a description of these in current language modern theories of social work will provide a model of attraction for the social sphere by the scale and severity of charitable acts. It is advantageous to know and popularize the beneficial deeds of the social institutions of the Church, not of vain pride, but of the desire that these social institutions in the Church become models and impulses for other people and institutions. The normative framework for the social activity in the Church is established both by the Holy Synod which establishes the norms of social-philanthropic assistance activity for the entire Romanian Orthodox Church and approves the measures for the organization of religious assistance in the army, prisons, hospitals, homes for children and the elderly, social settlements for disadvantaged people as well as state laws.

In the Orthodox Church, we mention, from a chronological point of view, some representative initiatives, which subsequently played a significant role in the coagulation of a non-governmental structure at the level of the Patriarchate.

Chancellery was founded. In 2001 were founded: The Alba Iulia Orthodox Philanthropy Association, the Craiova Vasiliada Association and the St. Basil the Great Orthodox Philanthropic Association of Galati, in order to establish in 2002 the Solidarity and hope Foundation of Iasi and the Social-cultural Association of Matei-Basarab from the Slobozia and Calarasi Diocese. And in 2006 the Philanthropy Foundation Timisoara, these eight organizations formed the foundation of the Since 2000, the Romanian Patriarchate has expressed strong concern about reconciliation with social inclusion initiatives, in order to clarify certain principles of interparliamentary action and cooperation, an important role in this regard in the annual meeting of social counselors.

In order to unite and discuss existing energy and resources, the coordinating advisers from specialized sectors of the various diocesan centers proposed the creation of a federal structure that would act uniformly, based on a common strategy of social involvement, at national level. The initiative was implemented in 2007, when eight of the most powerful and representative organizations in the Romanian Patriarchate, active in all eight development regions of Romania, were invited by the Holy Synod to grant a blessing for the establishment of such a structure. Thus, with the blessing of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church in 2007 was born the philanthropic Federation, the first federal organization in the Romanian Patriarchate.

This form of organization, which is similar to the Patriarchate, gives unity of action to members at the national level, but at the same time allows them to preserve their own programs of identity and action at the local level. In 2009, the eight founding organizations joined five others, and in 2021, the number of members of the Federation reached 24. From a legal point of view, the philanthropic League is a private non-profit organization, acting with the blessing of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. At present, it brings together the most active associations and funds active in the social sphere during the period leading to the Romanian Patriarchate. over the years, the federation has adapted its status to the development of a socio-legislative context and introduced high-quality admission criteria. Thus, in the philanthropic Federation, only representative organizations at diocesan level can be allowed, in this respect the explicit recommendation of the tenant is allowed, while demonstrating his professionalism by obtaining a certificate of accreditation as a provider of social services and managing at least one licensed social service.

The Alliance for philanthropy has carried out a comprehensive organizational development and process to establish its own values and strategic directions of action. Thus, the vision of the Federation is an ever living church through its members, and relevant by its actions to the people and their communities, the mission of the Federation is to support the Church in her social-philanthropic work for the people and their communities, in the spirit of Christian teaching, And the purpose of the federation is to increase the impact and efficiency of the social actions of the Member or partner organizations and the social structures of the Church by integrating them into a unitary, coordinated and coherent response to the current social challenges.

At the same time, the Federation has set three strategic objectives: The development of the organizational capacity of members or organizations wishing to become members and social structures in the Romanian Orthodox Church, Develop cooperation between its members and between them and organizations wishing to become members and the social structures of the Church, and facilitate the exchange of information and good practices between Member organizations, other non-governmental organizations working with the blessing of the pins and their social-philanthropic sectors and the preparation and implementation of joint strategies and
programs in the field of social, medical, educational and community development. The broader framework for philanthropy has become a space where Member organizations have the opportunity to work together, exchange experience and specialists to improve their work and develop joint projects for the benefit of those who need it.

In this way, the philanthropic Federation has become a platform for dialog, growth, organizational and professional development, as well as for joint action, which will firmly mark the social inclusion strategy of the Romanian Patriarchate, the representation of the Orthodox Church in various consultative structures at regional and central level, joint actions at strategic level.

Inspired by the social teaching of the Catholic Church, the mission of Caritas organizations is to support the poor and socially marginalized to express and regain the right to a decent and dignified life through complex social assistance programs and charitable and humanitarian actions. Caritas is based on the creation of a civilization of love and solidarity among people. The ten Caritas organizations active in Romania met in 1994 in a national network: The Caritas Romania Confederation. Created with the aim of promoting the social projects of its members, Caritas Romania is involved in lobbying and influencing social policies at both national and European level through Caritas Europa. All Caritas organizations in Romania have partnerships with local authorities and provide services to children from disadvantaged backgrounds at risk, people with special needs, large and low-income families, the elderly. Through complex programs in the field of social assistance carried out by Caritas in Romania, we respond annually to the needs of a number of 70,000 beneficiaries.

Caritas is an international organization, present in 165 countries around the world and helps 24 million people in need annually through more than 440,000 employees and 625,000 volunteers. The organization coordinates and carries out the socio-charitable activity of the Catholic Church on whose social teaching it bases all its actions. Through their work, Caritas organizations support the poor and socially marginalized to express and regain the right to a decent and dignified life through complex social assistance programs and charitable and humanitarian actions. Caritas organizations in Romania have resumed their activity since 1990, systematically addressing the social problems of the Community. The structuring of the organizations followed the administrative system of the dioceses in Romania.

In 1994, Caritas Romane – Catholic organizations active in Romania at that time established the Caritas Romania Confederation – a non-governmental network organization meant to represent at national and international level the interests of its members. Over the years, the charitable activity was promoted and developed by the Caritas Greco-Catholic organizations established and located subsequently to the Caritas Romania Confederation. Currently, it is composed of 10 organizations: Caritas Alba-Iulia Organization, Diocesan Caritas Center Iași, Caritas Federation of the Diocese of Timisoara, Caritas Bucharest Association, Caritas Catolica Oradea, Caritas Satu Mare Organization, Caritas Metropolitan Greek-Catholic Association Blaj, Caritas Eparhial Association Greco-Catholic Cluj, Caritas- Caritas Association, Caritas Eparuco-Catholic Association Oradea.

Throughout its existence, the Confederation of Caritas Romania developed and coordinated at national level a series of programs whose projects were implemented by Member organizations acting directly at local level. They were supported in the development of their own structures by providing training sessions, disseminating information and providing material resources. Of these programs we especially mention the Home Care Program. Home care – as a strategy to confront the aging phenomenon associated with the poverty of older people, especially those in rural areas, supplements informal care and assistance provided by
family members, neighbors and volunteers with efficient professional services at moderate costs. Since 1994, this system of home assistance for older people has been implemented by Caritas organizations in our country. Over time, the financing of the operation of this type of service was partially taken over by the local communities, Caritas collaborating with local and county authorities. Home care has proven to be a factor in strengthening civil society, managing to combine the private responsibilities of the family and Community with social responsibilities. Other programs that Caritas Romania coordinated and supported in their launch and implementation were: Counseling people with special needs, intervention in situations of emergency caused by natural disasters and programs of prevention and drug counseling. Currently, the Caritas Romania Confederation focuses its activity in the following directions: Lobbying and advocacy, capacity building, interventions in case of natural disasters, international cooperation, initiatives and positions of the Confederation are based on data and facts provided by the Member organizations, as a result of the direct experience with the beneficiaries.

At national level, the activity of Caritas organizations is carried out in 30 counties and is focused on specialized areas where various complex social assistance services are provided: home care, socio-medical services for the elderly and people with disabilities, direct assistance and counseling, day care centers for children, young people and the elderly, old people’s homes, community and professional integration activities for socially disadvantaged people, direct intervention and reconstruction programs in case of natural disasters. The size and extent of these activities designates the Caritas network as the largest provider of non-profit private social services in the country.

5. Conclusions

The general conclusion that emerges from the above is clear: the church has always supported the search for a better, more humane life and has fought so that the inhabitants of the parish have what is necessary for a decent life and the large number of settlements belonging to the Church, which are in increasing order, is eloquent in this sense, an example that is urgent to follow in the conditions of the troubled and pressing times of life today.

Philanthropy in the true sense of the word can only be Christian, and social work must be disinterested, the Church serving only out of the love of men. In this service of man, purified of every other intention and similar to the service of Christ, the veneration of God is most actively manifested. In brotherly love and mutual service, the dignity that God willed at the expense of his children is manifested. Only if Christians manifest this love and fulfill this ministry, do they remain true Christians. When they work against the love of brothers and forget the service of man, they cease to follow their Lord. “The Savior Christ emphasizes love of neighbor, and the criterion of judgment will be precisely his love or non-love, his service or rejection, and none of us, however poor and burdened in life with cares, needs and shortcomings, can say that he had nothing to offer, at least a few times, a piece of bread for the hungry, a glass of water for the thirsty, or clothes for the poor. None of us can excuse the indifference of not visiting a sick person who asked him for nothing but the fact that he was somehow waiting for a shred of communion and love” [3].

It is therefore inadmissible that the Church should strive for dignity, instead of being ready for a comprehensive service toward men to defend rights and privileges, instead of intervening for the right of one’s neighbor. For the saving act of God is made by his creatures in works of love. He who wishes to maintain this deed for himself has already been lost [4].
Before God and the world, a Christianity of great words is of no value, but the Christianity of the deed attached to the realities of human life. To serve people is to serve God who founded the service. For Christians, it is a gift and honor placed on his shoulders by God, who makes his collaborator in the development of humanity. By serving men, the Christian serves God at the same time, for God himself works upon men through men and allows himself to be served by the deed of man served.

Service in all the compartments of human life is most necessary in our day. Only the love of man can remove threats of any kind, abolish racial barriers, the dividing walls, and the plagues of disease and hunger more than ever, man must love man and put his soul to him, through love to reach service broken from the heart, the service that goes from the heart and reaches the heart. Regardless of profession, we must have no other ideal than that, that by what we do we may be useful to life, love man, and sacrifice ourselves to his service. We must find the purpose of our existence in the service of man, we must step from serving to proexisting, that is, we must commit ourselves to exist for others, just as the Savior has committed himself at the cost of his life to exist for us. We must live and die for the world, for its happiness, but above all for its life; therefore, it is evident that man’s greatest task is to sustain and promote the existence of others, to promote truth and life in the world [5].

References