From Philanthropy to Christian Social Assistance. The Perspective of Beneficiaries of Social-Philanthropical Services of the Roman Orthodox Church

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Abstract: This article presents the results of a sociological survey through a questionnaire aiming to investigate the perception of the beneficiaries of philanthropic and social assistance services offered by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Archdiocese of Iași, for different categories of people in difficulty. The research envisages the way beneficiaries see themselves in connection with the specificity of faith-based social services, as well as their degree of satisfaction with these services. The research was carried out between September 2018 and February 2019 in the Archdiocese of Iași, which consists of 13 deaneries and 1221 parishes, disposed on the territory of Iasi, Neamț and Botoșani Counties. The most important results lead to the conclusion that the services offered by the Orthodox Church are not conditioned by the membership and participation of the beneficiaries in the Christian religion, that in many situations, but not all, the assistance received from the Church is complementary to that received from the state, philanthropic and social assistance activities are regarded by the beneficiaries as a continuum of services, and the priest plays a central role in initiating the provision of social and philanthropic services within the Church.

Keywords: *philanthropy; professionalization; social assistance; Orthodox church.*

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Introduction

When we discuss the perception of beneficiaries regarding the aid received from organizations, entities or institutions, whether they are faith-based or not, we may probably say that it is more important for them to overcome the state of vulnerability in which they find themselves in rather than the organizational framework that makes it possible for them to be helped. For specialists (Frunză, 2012, Gavriluță, 1998, 2002, 2011), however, the question arises whether the activity carried out within the Church is convergent with the expectations of beneficiaries, so that they feel valued, but especially understood and accepted, often feeling the altruistic love and dedication of priests or social assistants involved in social-philanthropic activity (Cojocaru, Cojocaru, & Sandu, 2011; Sandu & Caras, 2013), as well as what fundamentally differentiates the help provided by secular organizations from that provided through faith-based organizations (Fountain & Feener, 2017; Hosu & Frunză, 2013; Howarth, 2007; Jeavons, 2004: 140-145; Nistor, 2019a; Sider & Unruh, 2004).

The socio-philanthropic activity of the Church will be analyzed, based on the specifics of faith-based organizations, according to the model formulated by Sider and Unruh (2004), and at the same time we will try to identify if there are any particularities related to the specificity of the assistance services in Orthodoxy. We intend to determine whether we can speak of an atypical situation in the case of the Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization that calls on the beneficiaries to participate in religious services, without making conditioning the provision of social and philanthropic services upon participation in these services.

Philanthropy versus social assistance in the post-secular society. The model of Sider and Unruh

One of the first questions that motivated us to do this research was to what extent the spiritual value of social assistance practice influences the model of functioning of social assistance and philanthropy in the case of organizations based on Orthodox faith (Siedenburg, 1922). In the literature (Sandu & Caras, 2013) it was stated that the purpose of the act of assistance for a secular organization is not to do well, to help, as this element is what essentially defines philanthropy. Social work in the secular organization should have another purpose, namely to socially integration of the beneficiary, in order to minimize the pressure on the state to ensure the welfare of its citizens, while social assistance provided by faith-based

organizations has, besides the aims of reducing the vulnerability of the beneficiaries, the intrinsic purpose of this type of practice, which is that of doing good, which places it in a continuum with philanthropic activity (Nistor, 2018a).

Although several types of faith-based organizations have been identified in the literature (Clarke, 2008; Johnsen, 2014; Marx & Hopper, 2005; Smith & Sosin, 2001; Van der Merve, Swart, & Hendriks, 2014), one of the most complete and widely accepted models of analysis for the work of faith-based organizations (FBO) is the one developed by Sider and Unruh (2004), in the particular model of these authors, faith-permeated organizations (which is one of the five types of FBOs presented by authors), participation in religious rituals and practices is a condition for the success of social intervention, catechetical activity being strictly correlated with the social one. Professionalization of the philanthropic social services of the Church, where this process takes place, is achieved by adding a spiritual dimension to the secular values of the assistential profession, being an appropriate model for the post-secular society. Social-philanthropic and social assistance activities are seen as a continuum of social practice in the Church, and the distinction from secular social assistance is by the degree of involvement of the participants (Nistor, 2018b, 2018c).

At public opinion level, social assistance is generally placed in a superior position to philanthropy, because of its professionalism. However, in traditional religious environments, there is no perception that there might be a risk for secularization of social work within the Church, that could arise from professionalization of social services, although there is a reserve for professionalisation and especially for the bureaucratic hyperprofessionalization of the activity of social assistance deployed by the Church (Nistor, 2019b). The research was based on the assumption that there is an atypical situation in the case of the Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization, who calls on the beneficiaries to participate in religious services, but does not condition the provision of social and philanthropic services by participating in these services, in contrast to the particular model of Sider and Unruh (2004), where participation in these rituals and religious practices was, in the case of the faith-permeated organization, a condition for the success of social intervention, as catechetical activity is strictly correlated with the social one.

Research objectives

O1. This research looks at the particularities of faith-based social services and/or of Christian social assistance, as perceived by the beneficiaries. In fulfilling this objective, we will take steps to highlight the degree of satisfaction of beneficiaries with regard to the quality and efficiency of social services and the philanthropic activities provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

O2. The second objective aims to validate the social-philanthropic services analysis model offered by the Romanian Orthodox Church from the perspective of its Christian peculiarities, as identified by beneficiaries.

Research hypotheses

Hypothesis H1. The social-philanthropic services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization are conditioned by the membership and participation of the beneficiaries in the Christian religion.

Hypothesis H2. Social and philanthropic assistance received by beneficiaries from the Romanian Christian Church is complementary to that received by the Romanian state and/or by other organizations.

Hypothesis H3. Philanthropic and social assistance activities are viewed by beneficiaries as a continuum of services.

Hypothesis H4. The priest plays a central role in initiating the provision of social and philanthropic services within the Church.

Research methodology

This research is based on a questionnaire survey developed between December 2018 and February 2019 among beneficiaries of social services and philanthropic activities carried out by the Romanian Orthodox Church in the Archdiocese of Iasi, which is comprised of Iasi, Botosani and Neamt Counties. Due to the fluctuation of beneficiaries, an optimal sample size could not be identified. Our sample is formed by a total of 430 respondents, but 10 questionnaires were considered invalid because of the large number of non-responses, therefore they were excluded from the research.

Sampling

Sampling is random, with an opportunity sample of 420 people among the beneficiaries of philanthropic and social assistance services who

have been present at various social assistance centers and institutions, as well as among those who have benefited from philanthropic aid from parishes during the survey. The questionnaire was self-applied, handed over to the respondents by priests or social assistants. They answered any questions to the extent that they were aware of regarding the topic of the questions, without having a particular prior training regarding the completion of the questionnaire. At the time they were given the questionnaire, they were presented with the purpose and objectives of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation in research, and the possibility of withdrawing at any time - either completely or partially - by refusing to answer certain questions or by selecting the non-response option, which was presented for most questions.

Of the 420 respondents, 123 are male and 274 females, 23 of whom refuse to declare their gender. Female respondents account for 65% of the sample, and male respondents for 29%, the similarity between the share of gender in the sample structure and the same share among all beneficiaries was confirmed by persons who acted as surveyors and who are familiar with the type of beneficiaries of social-philanthropic services within the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Regarding the age of the participants, 50 are aged between 18 and 25 years, 176 between 25 and 45 years, and 173 are over 45 years of age. 17 respondents did not declare their age. Under 30 people declared over 65 years of age. The respondents who participated in the survey were equally divided (42%) between those aged 45+ and those of 25-45 years, while only 12% were aged 18-25 years. Non-responses amounted to 4% of respondents.

Regarding the civil status of the participants, 46% of them are married and 38% are unmarried, including the persons who declared themselves widowed and 11% said they were divorced. 5% did not declare their civil status.

As far as the level of education is concerned, most of participants in the research graduated only 8 grades - representing 20% of those surveyed. 18% of the sample are those who graduated only 10 grades, 17% are high school graduates, 15% of respondents have only 4 grades, 10% have university studies, while 7% have studied in a vocational school, 7% declare themselves completely without studies, 3% attended a post-secondary school, 1% attended postgraduate studies. The non-response rate represents 2% of the questioned persons.

We note that the percentage of those without education or with under-graduate average education accounts for a total of 60% of the

respondents, while those with higher or post-graduate studies account for 11% of the total sample.

The different percentages regarding the level of studies is only partially similar to the proportions of beneficiaries who are in need of social assistance, but statements of the survey participant also show that the percentage of those who have not completed high school studies among all beneficiaries is around 50%. This can correlate with poverty , which causes the beneficiaries to turn to the philanthropic services of the Church, the risks of extreme poverty being higher at national level among those with a low level of education. This is why some social-philanthropic services aim to provide scholarships to support high school students from poor or dysfunctional families, including those whose parents are working abroad or who come from rural areas, from families of chronic socially assisted persons.

The results obtained and the interpretation of the data

Asked about one of the reasons that may generate respondents' need, namely parenthood, we found that 68% of respondents said they are parents, only 28% are not parents, and 4% did not want to respond to this question.

Figure 1 – Parental status of the respondents

Regarding the number of dependent children the respondents take care of, 36% of them said they had no dependent children and the remaining 44% had at least one dependent child (12%), but some had 2 children (16%), 3 children (11%), or even more than 3 children (11%). 14% of respondents did not want to say whether or not they have dependent children.

Number of dependent children

Figure 2 – Number of dependent children

We were interested in finding out the net monthly income per family member in respondents family, meaning that we asked such a question to the people who participated in the survey, of which 50% proved to have a net monthly income less than 800 lei, 19% have a net income between 800 and 1200 lei per month, 17% have no income, 11% have a net income between 1200 and 2000 lei per month, 2% did not want to answer and only 1% have a monthly net income of over 2000 lei per month.

Actually, most beneficiaries live in absolute poverty (67%) or relative poverty (19%), resulting in a share of people living in poverty - an average per capita income of less than 250 €/month - of 86%. As is to be expected, poverty is the main negative social phenomenon fought by the social-philanthropic activity of the Church, this being in line with the traditional teaching of the Church to help the poor. On the other hand, the type of beneficiaries helped by the Church focus its efforts on philanthropic activities in the form of material aid in crisis situations.

Figure 3 – Net monthly income per family member of the respondents

The respondents' home environment shows a balanced percentage of urban residents (48%) and those living in rural areas (40%), while 12% of respondents did not want to respond.

Figure 4 – Residence of respondents

Religious affiliation of respondents is 94% Christian-Orthodox, 3% non-religious, 2% Christian-Catholic; 0% Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Muslims, or Protestant Christians and 1% declined to respond.

Specific to faith-based social work programs or Christian social assistance is that most of the beneficiaries belong to the Christian-Orthodox religion, but faith-based organization of Orthodox affiliation especially accept to help beneficiaries belonging to other Christian denominations, Catholic in the present case. The fact that there are no Neo-Protestant, Jewish or Muslim beneficiaries is explained by the refusal of these people to address an Orthodox faith-based organization - another faith-based organization than one affiliated to the denomination they belong to - and less by social workers' (that are affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Church) refusal to offer help to people of another religion, although this refusal can not be ruled out in particular cases.

Figure 5 – Respondents religion

Regarding the degree of religiosity of respondents, we measured their religiosity according to four dimensions: attending church services, fasting, practicing prayer, almsgiving. Although 23% of respondents did not want to answer this question, 24% went to Church once a week, 21% several times a week, 14% once a month, 12% attended Church only at important Christian celebrations, and 6% said they did not go to Church.

Frequent participation in religious practices and ceremonies is expected for recipients of services provided by faith-based organizations or especially when access to these services is in competition with access to public social assistance services, which makes Christian social assistance services appealing to beneficiaries who generally have a previous religious experience and practice. However, the fact that 12% of respondents attend Church only on important Christian celebrations and 6% do not attend Church at all shows that participation in such religious rituals is not a condition for access to church-provided social and philanthropic services. The H1 hypothesis is not verified: the beneficiaries of the social-philanthropic services provided by the Church are not conditioned by their membership and practice of the Christian religion.

Regarding fasting, a similar percentage of people like the one in the previous question (24% in this case) refused to answer, while 28% of respondents answered that they respect important fastings over the year and on Wednesdays and Fridays, 17% only respect important fastings over the year, but not entirely, 16% totally respect important fastings over the year, and 15% do not fast.

The fact that 15% of the respondents do not fast, and 17% of them only fast during important fastings, shows that strict adherence to religious practices, although religiously necessary, is not a prerequisite for benefiting from philanthropic services offered by the Church. In other words, the Church does not condition the provision of support and mercy on the manifest religiosity of the beneficiaries. This distinguishes the practice of Christian philanthropy in the Orthodox Church from the model formulated by Sider and Unruh (2004), which shows that in the case of faith-permeated organisations, the provision of services to beneficiaries is conditioned by the obvious expression of religious belief and frequent participation in practices and religious rituals. The answers to this question show again that the H1 hypothesis is not verified.

Concerning the practice of prayer, there is an even greater percentage of people who did not want to answer (29%), but on the other hand, 38% of respondents say they pray daily, 15% pray more times a week, 6% once a week, 5% only pray when they go to Church, 3% say they

pray less than once a month, 3% do not pray at all, and 1% pray once a month.

Almsgiving seems to be a sensitive topic for 30% of respondents, who have refused to answer this question, 19% say they never give away alms, because they can not afford it, 17% do it rarely, 17% rarely, 13% often do it, 3% very often, and 1% say they disagree with the idea of almsgiving.

Religiosity: church attendance

Figure 6 – Respondents' degree of religiosity: Church attendance

Figure 7 – Respondents' degree of religiosity: Fasting

Figure 8 – Respondents' degree of religiosity: Prayer

Figure 9 – Respondents' degree of religiosity: Almsgiving

Regarding whether beneficiaries of social assistance services or charity acts provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church also benefit from social assistance services provided by the state or private entities or organizations, we find that 36% do not benefit from other social assistance services other than those provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church, 34% benefit from services provided by City Halls, 13% benefit from social services from the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, 8% receive such services from associations and foundations, 6% did not know or did not want to answer the question, and 3% benefit from social services from the County Agency for Employment.

As presented above, social assistance and philanthropic help received from the Romanian Orthodox Church is complementary to that received from the State, through its various institutions and organizations, in a proportion of 50%. This makes the H2 hypothesis - according to which social and philanthropic assistance received by beneficiaries of the Romanian Orthodox Church is complementary to that received from the Romanian State and/or other organizations - to be only partially verified. The fact that 36% of beneficiaries do not benefit from other forms of support can be explained either by the fact that due to social situations they do not qualify as beneficiaries for other types of social assistance, or

the crisis situation in which they find themselves in is temporary - the support received from the Church being sufficient - , or they do not know their rights as potential beneficiaries, and they do not know whom to address in order to receive the support they need. In any of these situations, the Romanian Orthodox Church remains an important provider of social services on which a significant number of beneficiaries rely, which shows the need to develop and professionalize the services provided by the Church because of its unique position and the high credibility it enjoys among the population.

Figure 10 – Types of social assistance services that respondents benefit from provided by other institutions than the Romanian Christian Church

Regarding the form of social aid provided to beneficiaries, consisting of money received from the Romanian government, we find that 40% received state allowance for children, 16% did not receive social benefits from the state, 14% received the minimum guaranteed monthly income, 9% benefited from unemployment benefits, 7% received disability pension, 7% declare that they have received other types of social benefits from the Romanian government (including social assistance, financial

subsidies for sending children in camps), 5% did not know or refused to answer, and 2% received a survivor's pension.

Types of social benefits received from the Romanian government

Figure 11 – Forms of social benefits that respondents received from the Romanian government

Asked if they benefit or benefited from philanthropy or social assistance services from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the respondents responded in a proportion of 34% that they only benefited from philanthropy, only 33% from social assistance services, 24% from philanthropy and also from social assistance, 6% did not want to respond, and 3% did not benefit from philanthropy or social assistance services from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

It is notable that respondents benefited equally both from philanthropic and social assistance provided by the Church, 24% saying they received both types of support from the Church. The hypothesis is practically confirmed, that philanthropic and social assistance activity is viewed by beneficiaries as a continuum of services and rarely as separate services from liturgical ones.

Figure 12 – Respondent's status as beneficiary of social services or philanthropy provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Ask about what kind of philanthropic acts the Romanian Orthodox Church made towards them, 32% of respondents say they received food, 22% received money, 18% medicine for their illness or their family illness, 17% received clothes for children, 4% have been assisted in building, repairing or arranging housing, 3% say they received other types of help (including accommodation in daycare centers, hosting, psychological counseling, moral support and encouragement, social counseling, requisites for children, payment of medical investigations, housing in residential centers), 2% say they didn't benefit from philanthropy from the Romanian Orthodox Church and 2% refused to answer.

Regarding the type of social assistance services that respondents benefited from the Romanian Orthodox Church , 50% received counseling and guidance services (specifically, they discussed problems they faced with a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church, in a context other than confession), 12% were the beneficiaries of services for the elderly, either provided directly to them or to a member of their family, who had

lived for a while in a social establishment of the Church for the elderly or in another type of social housing, 11% were beneficiaries of day-care services for children, organized as crèches or programs after school, 10% were subjects of medical-social services for people with disabilities, 7% benefited from other types of aids (among which the respondents enumerate scholarships for children to continue their studies, rent payment for children who studied in other cities, social canteen), 6% did not know how or declined to answer.

We can see that philanthropic activities are generally based on occasional support for food, money, medicines or clothing when people are in crisis situations. However, this type of non-specialized philanthropic activities can be licensed, as are occasional social benefits provided by public social assistance services in accordance with the law on social assistance. In practice, benefits are a form of assistance for people in difficulty who can allow them to emerge from a temporary crisis situation, but for beneficiaries, they bring about the risk of creating a chronic social problem and dependence on support provided either by the state or by social- philanthropic organizations - as is the case with the help provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

For this reason, in social assistance practice, the provision of benefits is often coordinated with the provision of counseling services and other specialized services - including access to training, employment support etc. New legal changes condition the granting of benefits - such as minimum guaranteed income - upon accepting a job (when offered to the beneficiary), participating in training programs etc. On the same model, the Romanian Orthodox Church could develop its social assistance services, such as social assistance in for crisis situations, in order to intervene efficiently where the beneficiaries of the philanthropic activities of the Church remain in a state of chronic dependence of social benefits. Applying the principle of subsidiarity - providing aid when the individual or group is in a crisis of resources to be self-sufficient and, at the same time, supporting it to develop its legitimate access to resources, including those available in the community - could lead to more efficient redistribution and determine the Romanian Orthodox Church to act as a policy maker in the sphere of social services. The ability of the Church to mobilize community resources and to make them accessible to beneficiaries places it in a strategic gate-keeper position for the redistribution of existing resources within the community, and at the same time, through its mission and tradition, the Church has the legitimacy to intervene in community development processes, facilitating the access of

disadvantaged categories to the community and, implicitly, to community-based rehabilitation processes.

As far as social assistance services are concerned, they are overwhelmingly (for 50% of respondents) based on counseling and mentoring, an activity which could include the ones outlined above, namely to guide people to legitimate resources and the formation of social and personal autonomy skills, as well as advocacy activities in the community, in favor of various categories of vulnerable persons.

Forms of philanthropic help received from the Romanian Orthodox Church

Figure 13 – Forms of philanthropic help received from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Types of social assistance activities provide by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Figure 14 – Types of social assistance activities provide by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Asked about the usefulness that philanthropy of the Romanian Orthodox Church had as far as they are concerned, respondents indicated, in a proportion of 74%, that these philanthropic acts helped them very much, 18 % said they helped them, but only a little bit compared to their needs, and 8% believe that the philanthropic acts of the Romanian Orthodox Church did not help them at all.

Regarding the usefulness of social assistance services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church, 79% of respondents say that these services helped them, 8% that they did not help them, and 13% did not want to answer the question.

Analyzing the perceived utility of the philanthropic activities of the Church, we find that 26% of respondents consider that the aid received was not or was not fully effective, which can be explained by the fact that it did not coincide with the expectations of the beneficiaries - whether in value or in frequency -, because the effectiveness of humanitarian aid can be measured by correlation with the person's success to overcome a crisis situation and the ability of that person or their family to cope alone and to be able to ensure normal social functioning . The chronic shortage of resources, which affects over 50% of respondents, makes the efficiency of

philanthropic aid provided in food, money, clothing, construction materials etc. temporary. In practice, we can talk about this efficiency in terms of the care paradigm (Miftode, 2014), measuring it as the ability of the individual or family to maintain their social status quo and to use practically and effectively the aid received for the purpose of preventing the further degradation of their social situation.

It is noteworthy that as far as the social assistance services offered by the Church are concerned, they are considered ineffective by only 8% of respondents, and others, in a proportion of 79%, consider them as effective and helpful. We can say that this is a result of applying the principle of subsidiarity, the practical accompaniment of social assistance services by those offered through counseling and mobilizing beneficiaries and the community they are part of in favor of reducing the social problem. We consider this to be an argument for continuing the professionalization of social assistance services offered by the Church and the gradual transition from singular philanthropic practices in times of crisis to complex practices - philanthropic and social -, that aim not only at overcoming a temporary crisis, but also at developing social and cognitive autonomy of beneficiaries by forming skills for an autonomous social life.

Figure 15 – The usefulness of philanthropy provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church from the perspective of beneficiaries

Figure 16 – The usefulness of social assistance services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church from the perspective of beneficiaries

Regarding the frequency of providing philanthropic aids by the Romanian Orthodox Church, 44% of respondents have benefited from such aids more often than twice a year, 26% once a year, 15% twice a year, and 15% did not want to respond.

Correspondingly, the frequency of providing social assistance services by the Romanian Orthodox Church is more than twice a year for 54% of respondents, once a year for 20% of them and twice a year for 10%, while 16% of respondents did not want to answer this question.

The increased percentage of persons who benefited more often than twice a year of philanthropy from the Church shows that there is a dependence on philanthropy for some of these beneficiaries, which could be diminished by integrating beneficiaries into a range of complex psychosocial services, that prevent dependency on social assistance and philanthropy and are based on the principle of subsidiarity. Obviously, due to poor social conditions or health, some of the beneficiaries will inevitably remain in a state of dependence on social support received both from the Church and from other sources. The diminishing of their vulnerable situation may, however, be possible in the context of a Christian social assistance that facilitates a community dynamism to revitalize its traditional

values, including social solidarity resources (Cojocaru, 2003 ; Miftode, 2014; Necula, 2015).

The state of chronic dependence on philanthropy and social assistance is a problem of all social assistance systems based on care - the beneficiary, once enrolled in the system that provides aid, frequently calls again for help, as he or she encounters various problems that create social dysfunctions. The emphasis on Christian values like solidarity puts the Church in a unique position to hold an important leverage not only in mobilizing community resources, but also within the community, as an essential part of it. Perhaps spiritual counseling may be required to make the beneficiaries aware of the spiritual role of compassion and of communicating with fellow human beings, of cooperating with others for the benefit of themselves and others.

Figure 17 – Frequency of philanthropic acts undertaken by the Romanian Orthodox Church for people in need

Frequency of social services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Figure 18 – Frequency of social services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church for beneficiaries

Asked in what context they came to benefit from philanthropy and/or social services from the Church, 48% of the persons who participated in the study responded that their priest or church representative contacted them and told them that they could benefit from this aid, 19% said that they found out from other beneficiaries, 15% went to church and asked for help by their own initiative, 11% said that City Hall employees or social workers told them they could benefit from philanthropy or social assistance from the Romanian Orthodox Church, 4% did not want to declare where they obtained information about these possibilities, 2% got the information from representatives of an NGO and 1% in other contexts (from the Deaconry, from the social worker of a hospital).

The fact that 49% of respondents point to the priest as the initiator of social and philanthropic service provision highlights the importance of the role he plays in the community in initiating the processes of assisting the poor by the Church. By correlating the number of people who benefit from philanthropy and/or social assistance only from the Romanian Orthodox Church with those who have been contacted by the priest to help them, they overlap by over 85%. We are talking about people who either do not have information about the rights they can benefit from, or

are embarrassed to seek help, including state funded aid, even if they have the legal right to benefit from it. The legitimacy of the priest in Christian environments places him in the position of a person who can initiate aid processes even when, from humility, the potential beneficiaries are not willing to seek this help. We believe that the H4 hypothesis is validated and the priest plays a central role in initiating the provision of social and philanthropic services within the Church.

The fact that only 2% of respondents were referred to the Church for service by other associations or foundations, in our view, shows that there is a reluctance of other social service providers to cooperate with the Church in the interest of beneficiaries, either because the social activity of the Church is not sufficiently known, or because there is a false impression that the services offered by the Church do not meet the required professional standards. As such, we believe that an increased activity for creating a public image of the Church as a social service provider would be beneficial, in correlation with establishing partnerships with various organizations that provide social services, based on the principle of the beneficiary's best interest, even if the intention is to follow the model expressed by Sider and Unruh (2004) in the form of a partnership between faith-based and secular organizations. This partnership does not affect the status of a faith-based social services provider, but enhances the possibility that social services offered by the Church will reach more beneficiaries, and the Church will also benefit from the positive experience in providing social services existing in many secular organizations. It should be taken into account that Christian social assistance, as we have seen, is based on added value, given precisely by the involvement of Christian values - solidarity, mercy, compassion - in the provision of services, but this completes and does not go against the values of professional social assistance, which eventually derive from those of Christian social assistance, but which have undergone a process of secularization in the context of the modern society.

It is important to note that 19% of beneficiaries have learned about the philanthropic services offered by the Church from other beneficiaries, which proves that there are solidarity resources at the level of Christian communities, which can and must be amplified to form the basis for rehabilitation activities supported by community.

Figure 19 – The way in which respondents came to benefit from philanthropy/social assistance from the Romanian Orthodox Church

Regarding certain counterbenefits or certain behaviors requested by the Romanian Orthodox Church for the beneficiaries of philanthropy or social services, 52% of respondents show that they have been asked to submit some documents, 23% say they have been asked to go to Church, to pray and to fast, 14% say they haven't been asked a thing, 8% did not want to answer the question, 3% say they have been asked to engage in other behaviors (to oppose the abortion of the child by the wife, to help to carry garbage, not to have a home, in order to be eligible certain types of services).

We note that, contrary to the model proposed by Sider and Unruh (2004), for this type of faith-based organization, only 23% of respondents declare that they were asked to go to Church or to fast, but these requests may be interpreted rather like a spiritual advice, than a necessary condition for receiving help. We conclude this because helping one's fellow human beings is a spiritual dimension that is unconditional, but a good Christian will teach Christian teaching and encourage beneficiaries to follow the,

when and if they are open to receive such guidance. Moreover, the work of spiritual workers in social care institutions is considered to be a missionary activity, so they will also offer spiritual advice as well as religious services, when requested. The fact that 14% of beneficiaries declare that they have not been asked for absolutely anything supports the idea previously set forth that philanthropy is offered unconditionally by the representatives of the Church and practically refutes hypothesis H1, according to which the social-philanthropic services offered by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization is conditioned by the membership and participation of the beneficiaries in the Christian religion. Moreover, the fact that 52% of respondents declare that they were asked to submit documents in order to receive services - that is, the same thing that would have been requested in the case of secular social services - can be interpreted it in the same sense that hypothesis H1 is not confirmed and there is virtually no condition for providing philanthropic and social services for only for persons who affiliate and participate in Christian practices and rituals.

Figure 20 – Conditions imposed by the Romanian Orthodox Church to people in need in order to benefit from philanthropy/social assistance

Ask if, when called for, needed or received help or services from the Church, the beneficiaries were conditioned by their belonging to a certain religion, they responded (71%) that that was not a requirement,

19% say they have been asked to have a particular religion, and 10% have avoided answering the question.

The answers to this question show that there is no unitary practice at Church level regarding the conditioning (or not) of belonging to the Christian community in order to receive social-philanthropic services, which is rather left to the social service providers within the Church, who - the vast majority - do not make these services conditional upon the beneficiary's religion. As we mentioned above, the fact that virtually all beneficiaries are of Christian religion can be explained by the refusal of recipients of another confession to address the Orthodox Church's with request for support, rather than the refusal of the Church's representatives to provide support. However, a significant number of 19% of respondents show that they have been asked to demonstrate their belonging to Christian religion, which makes the model of Christian social services offered by the Church partially and atypically fit in the model of faith - permeated organizations described by Sider and Unruh (2004). As we said, however, this request to belong to Christian religion is rather a particular initiative of some of the people involved in offering social-philanthropic services, being made in accordance with their own spiritual and professional consciousness. We assume that it may be desirable to have at least eparchial valid recommendations to clarify this situation and to guide the persons involved in the provision of services regarding the selection of beneficiaries.

Figure 21 – The influence of the recipient's religion in the decision of the Romanian Orthodox Church to provide aid or social services

Regarding the existence of any form of conditioning of the social assistance/social services that the Romanian Orthodox Church will impose to beneficiaries in terms of more frequent participation in church rituals (participating in rituals, fasting etc.), 57% show that such a condition was not imposed to them, 26% declare that they were asked to participate in rituals, and 17% did not want to respond.

Similar to the situation of the previous question on the conditioning of social services by religious affiliation, we can see that most respondents say they were not required to participate in religious practices and rituals. There are 26% of respondents to whom such participation was requested, but as in the case of the previous question, we believe that this participation has been recommended, rather than imposed. The initiative to ask beneficiaries to participate in Christian rituals and practices is rather an initiative of persons involved in providing services, than of the institution itself, being especially valid in the case of social services offered in settlements set up beside monasteries, where the religious practices which beneficiaries are invited to attend are current ones within the monastery. Again, we are talking about an atypical situation in the case of the Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization, that calls on the beneficiaries to participate in religious services, without making the provision of social and philanthropic services conditional upon participation in these services. In the case of the particular model set out by Sider and Unruh (2004), participation in these rituals and religious practices represented, in the case of the faith-permeated organizations, a condition for the success of social intervention, and the catechetical activity is strictly correlated with the social one.

Conditioning of aid by participation in rituals

Figure 22 – Conditionality of the aid received from the Romanian Orthodox Church by participating in rituals with religious character

The correlation between catechetical and philanthropic or social assistance has been measured by asking the question whether, while receiving help or social services from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the respondents were told about God and religion. 48% of respondents answered "yes", 34% answered "no", and 18% did not want to respond.

Spiritual counseling and missionary catechetical activity is a key element of the model of faith-permeated organizations, and it is to be expected that social services offered by a religious confession will be accompanied by faith teaching, this being, in accordance with Sider and Unruh's model (2004), a condition for success. The fact that 34% of respondents say they have not been told about religion at the time they received aid shows that catechetical activity is not programmatic for social services provided by the Church, and optional for the beneficiaries but constantly granted when they want to receive Christian teaching and to participate in the spiritual work of the Church.

Catechesis and philanthropic/social assistance activity

Figure 23 – The relationship between catechesis and philanthropic/social work activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church

The person who actually offers or provides social assistance services within the Romanian Orthodox Church is indicated to be, most frequently, the social assistant or social worker of the Church, in 54% of cases, in 35% of cases this person is the priest, 4% show that there are other people than social workers, priests or deacons (bishop, priest's wife) and 3% did not want to answer the question.

The existence of a social worker, pointed out by 54% of respondents, allows us to conclude that the specialization and

professionalization of the social-philanthropic services within the Church is at a high level in most of the parishes and establishments in which these services are provided, even though in all cases those who were appointed to participate in the social assistance activity have undergone formal institutional training in the field. The role of the priest in initiating and effectively deploying social-philanthropic services remains significant, with 35% of respondents saying that the priest is the person involved in social services. These percentages make us believe that in most situations teams are formed under the coordination of the priest, including volunteers and social workers, whether or not they are professional social workers.

The massive involvement of priests in social and philanthropic activity requires, in our opinion, the provision of training programs in the social-philanthropic activity for priests at eparchial level, and the introduction of philanthropy and social assistance courses at the pastoral departments of the faculties of theology. Preparing a priest in the field of assistance should not be a substitute for the pastoral training of the priest, but should allow him to efficiently carry out the social mission when he assumes it, by doing his philanthropic actions in a traditional manner, in strict accordance with the Christian teaching, based on the tradition of St. John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great, in accordance with the Christian values of mercy, compassion and self-giving, but benefiting from the professional experience of modern social assistance, integrated and internalized as Christian social assistance.

Figure 24 – The representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church who actually helps the beneficiary

Asked which of the services are more trustworthy (as a comparison between those provided by the Church and those provided by the state), 64% of respondents indicate that they have a higher trust in the social services provided by the Church, compared to only 19% who have greater confidence in state-provided services, and a fairly low percentage of only 5%, who have the highest confidence in the services provided by secular NGOs. 12% of respondents did not want to answer this question.

The tremendous confidence in the social services offered by the Church allows us to believe that the beneficiaries perceive the added value that Christianity brings to social assistance compared to the secular one, and which is given precisely by the spiritual values that motivate professionals, bringing them closer to beneficiaries, more empathic towards them and, last but not least, more loving towards them. We note the low degree of confidence that respondents have in social services provided by secular NGOs, which we associate precisely with the lack of empathic communication between some social assistants and beneficiaries, due to the lack of a spiritual foundation of professional communication in the environments that are purely secular.

The degree of trust in social services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church (R.O.C.)

Figure 25 – Degree of trust of beneficiaries in social services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Ask about how satisfied they are with the social services they received from the Romanian Orthodox Church, 69% of respondents say

they are very satisfied, 22% say they are only partially satisfied/dissatisfied, 4% are very satisfied and 5% did not want to answer.

The increased satisfaction of recipients with the services received from the Church allows us to conclude that the work carried out within the Church is convergent with the expectations of beneficiaries, so that they feel valued - but especially understood and accepted, often feeling the love and dedication in the altruistic way in which priests or social assistants get involved in the social-philanthropic activity.

Figure 26 – Degree of satisfaction of beneficiaries regarding social services provided by the Romanian Orthodox Church

Discussions and limitations

The high fluctuation of beneficiaries makes the results obtained only partially possible to verify, depending on the context of service provision and the people in the care of social services provided by the Church. However, the specificity of beneficiaries can be considered a constant one, and the studied population relatively homogeneous, so we consider the results obtained as conclusive and valid for the whole studied population. We also believe that the results can be partially extrapolated as a model of understanding the impact of Christian-Orthodox social-philanthropic services on beneficiaries, which makes this research a matter

of general interest and can be the basis for further studies based on this configured model of faith-based organization.

Conclusions

The analysis of the beneficiaries' perception of social and philanthropic services offered by the Church highlights a series of conclusions, such as the existence of a positive relationship between the degree of satisfaction of beneficiaries and the human and spiritual quality of the persons involved in the social-philanthropic activities of the Church.

H1. *The social-philanthropic services offered by the Romanian Orthodox Church as a faith-based organization are conditioned by the affiliation and participation of beneficiaries to the Christian religion.* This hypothesis has not been verified. Social-philanthropic services are not conditioned by religious affiliation or religious practice or participation in the worship activities by beneficiaries, who are called to participate, but this call is a Christian one, with no imperative side and no actions of coercion upon beneficiaries in order to participate. The existence of elements of Christian practice and of catechetical and missionary activities allows us to frame philanthropic and social assistance services provided by the Church within the faith-permeated organization model set forth by Sider and Unruh (2004), but it is an atypical model, in which obtaining positive results is not conditioned by the beneficiaries participation in the Christian rituals carried out in the parish, but rather by the trust that beneficiaries have in the persons who offer the services, precisely in their capacity as representatives of the Church.

H2. *Social and philanthropic assistance received by beneficiaries from the Romanian Orthodox Church is complementary to that received from the Romanian government and/or from other organizations.* This hypothesis is partially verified, because many of the beneficiaries are also beneficiaries of public social services. The distrust of part of the beneficiaries in secular social services has to be noticed, and at the same time the emphasis placed by respondents on the religious factor in the selection of social services they want to benefit from.

H3. *Philanthropic and social assistance activities are viewed by beneficiaries as a continuum of services.* The hypothesis is verified, beneficiaries considering equally that philanthropic services are those received both occasionally and through specialized social services.

H4. *The priest plays a central role in initiating the provision of social and philanthropic services within the Church.* The hypothesis is verified, the

beneficiaries clearly highlighting the role of the priest in the services they receive, as the priest is a key element both in initiating social services and in coordinating them. The spiritual guarantee and trust capital that a priest enjoys makes the social-philanthropic activities of the Church considered by some beneficiaries to be qualitatively superior compared to those offered by the public services or by other private organizations.

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