

Philanthropy in the Orthodox Church is the Basic Foundation of Social Assistance

Gabriela LĂZĂREANU

Assoc. Prof. PhD
Faculty of Orthodox Theology
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, ROMANIA

Abstract:

The paper entitled “Philanthropy in the Orthodox Church is the basic foundation of social assistance” seeks to emphasize the importance of philanthropy that underlies the establishment of social assistance. The first Christian centuries laid the foundations of social assistance, which was later institutionalized and transformed social assistance provided by Christians and non-Christians sporadically into constant assistance, provided to people in need. Christian help is one of the most important forms of love shown to one's neighbor and is a fundamental divine principle of the New Testament Law.

The New Testament presents the activity of the Savior which includes many good works in the form of miraculous healings, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the transformation of wine and even the resurrection from the dead miracles granted to the poor, children, widows and the elderly. He healed all kinds of sick people, doing good to all who had the joy of knowing Him. The miracles wrought by the Savior consisted of wonderful healings “and the news of Him went through all Syria, and they brought to Him all who were suffering, being afflicted with all manner of sicknesses and torments, the demon-possessed, the lunatics, the be weak, and He will heal them” (Pătuleanu 2010: 5). Through these deeds, the Savior Jesus Christ taught us that philanthropy must not remain a simple philosophical concept, but must be converted into deed, into a beneficent action of all that is human suffering.

Keywords: *sick, miracles, philanthropy, Christian help, human suffering*

Philanthropy in the Church is built on the apostolic teaching of the first Christian centuries in which “Care for the poor, the sick, for those in any suffering was and remains a preponderant concern of Christian communities at all times and in all places” (Pătuleanu 2010: 5).

Philanthropy in the Church is focused on supporting the human being for the purpose of its salvation and the spiritual part transcends the material part is as mentioned the “food” that the Church provides unconditionally.

The soul of man thus strengthened by spiritual nourishment has the power of resistance in social life.

Therefore the major orientation of the Church must be natural, that which encourages the connection between spiritual life and social activity, between prayer and action between godliness and generosity, between Liturgy and philanthropy.

It can be specified that the church tries to alleviate suffering both through the liturgical, spiritual, pastoral work, and through the philanthropic work which is the continuation of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sense, social philanthropy must not be separated from the ecclesial Liturgy, as it is a source of humble and sacrificial love. Social philanthropy is a pastoral philanthropy that guides man on the path of salvation, the main purpose being the cultivation of fraternal communion. The legacy left by Christ to the Apostles is perpetuated to this day and consists in missionary service which is a sacred responsibility that eases the burden of sin leading to the salvation of believers and close sacrificial love

God so loved the world that His Only Begotten Son He gave Him, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, for He did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3, 16-17).

This is the philanthropic mission of the Church but at the same time of every believer as a constituent part of the church.

1. Forms of help found in Antiquity

Philanthropy and forms of help to one's neighbor have existed since ancient times. In ancient Egypt various forms of charity were practiced mentioned in the inscriptions in pyramids, tombs or obelisks, as well as in the contents of papyrus scrolls. Material aid for those in need or disease is mentioned, emphasizing the seven deeds of bodily mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, dressing the naked, sheltering strangers, freeing the imprisoned, to bury the dead. Archaeological documents highlight the fulfillment of these duties by inscriptions in the form "I gave bread to the hungry", "I satiated the one who had nothing", "do not overlook with your pitcher the stranger", "I was a piece of clothes for the naked" and "I kept the shelter of the foreigner" (Vicovan 2001: 15).

Merciful leaders were also mentioned, such as Amenemope, whom the people called the “helper of the poor,” one of the fundamental requirements of the Egyptian faith being justice and self-help.

Among the Greek people, philanthropy in antiquity meant the manifestation of the divinity's love for man, but there was also a philanthropy based on man's love for man. Plato (427-347 BC) 1986, mentions the existence of “the love of God, of the divinity who took command of men to establish peace and justice among themselves, as well as to free them from enmity and war.” In the second case, philanthropy involved “the respect of a citizen for his peers, the goodwill of a king to his subjects, the care of society for orphans, the elderly, the sick and strangers” (Plato 1998: 23).

In the Homeric era, philanthropy was the aid given to beggars, the poor, foreigners and the elderly. There were places in these communities specially arranged for foreigners (for traveling Greeks or for foreigners) and the needy also received shelter and food. These settlements were called xenons and the catalog was located in different temples and near them serving as places of rest and healing (hospitals). Sophocles' work “Antigone and Xenophon” emphasizes the spirit of brotherhood, of the friendship that underlies philanthropy, stating that

if one wants the protection of the gods, he must help them; if he wants to be honored by a city, he must serve it; if he wants to be admired by all of Greece, he must be its benefactor (Vicovan 2001: 45).

The philanthropic forms encountered in ancient Greece were organized either by the state or privately, but their mode of operation and development depended on the policy of the rulers of those times.

In Ancient Rome, philanthropic forms appeared especially in situations of social crisis sometimes determined by natural or political causes (the accession of emperors, the celebration of victories, etc.). Seneca (4 BC - 65 AD) mentioned the philanthropic acts in seven books entitled “On good deeds” considering them mandatory. In his works he mentions that “it is not the work of a great spirit to give and to lose, but it is the work of a great spirit to lose and yet to give” (Seneca, trans. by Balaşa et alii 1981: 138).

The philanthropic forms encountered in ancient Rome are donations and colleges. Helping each other in the ancient Roman and Greek world

took the form of love of people, communion, the idea of community appears much later with Christianity. The reason for generosity being political or as a social rule imposed to ensure social prestige.

The term philanthropy is synonymous with charity, but is more often used because

it includes the Church's participation in the accomplishment of the philanthropic act and the performance of the philanthropic act in the name of the Savior and as a Christian, a man of the Church (Berilă and Sorescu 2005: 25).

Regarding helping others, Christianity offers a very special perspective, the Christian can not love God and hate his neighbor. The scripture says,

If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (Jn. 20-21).

therefore the Christian cannot conceive of any other kind of love.

2 Philanthropy in Holy Scripture the basis of social assistance

In the Holy Scriptures the forms of philanthropy mentioned are in connection with God, the motivation being different from that of the pagan world. Mention is made of the forms of organization and regulation even in the Old Testament, which concerned forms of poverty such as the return of the land to the family that had owned it after a period of time. Fruits and wheat are the fruits of the earth that did not have to be harvested entirely to remain a part and for the poor, widows and orphans (Deut. 24, 19-22). To these are added the harvests of the sabbatical years (Ex. 23, 11). The usury was forbidden. What was borrowed had to be forgiven in the sabbatical year and the poor were not to be oppressed. It can be mentioned that the change in the perception of help, property, fellows, also results from the differences between polytheistic beliefs in ancient peoples and monotheism in the chosen people where God is "Father of orphans and judge of widows" God being perceived as "merciful and gentle". He takes upon Himself all needs (Prov. 12, 10; 14, 31).

The Christian faith starts from the premise that people have a common origin in God, the same constitution, which is why in the Old Testament there is a superior position of the people chosen by the rights

granted to foreigners in Israel by rest, sabbatical rest and invitation to meals. Slaves also had a better position, as the law forbade them from being oppressed (Ex. 21, 20). Solomon's prayer for the sanctification of the Temple also included non-Israelites, foreigners. Another aspect of a philanthropic nature is the sharing of livelihoods. In the Old Testament is presented the model of a law far superior to that established in the contemporary peoples of the Jews, where God has the quality of being merciful, - "if anyone cries out to Me I will hear him, because I am merciful" (Ex. 22, 27) or "Yours Lord is the pity" (Ps. 61, 11) - but also the main quality of being fair. This God of justice demands the same behavior from his sons, from being righteous especially to the poor.

With all these aspects, it can be mentioned that just as in the Old Testament religion is limited to the chosen people, the help is also limited to the chosen people. The work of healing appears in the Old Testament discourse as an integral part of the messianic work:

I, the Lord, have called you to my righteousness, and I have taken you by the hand, and I have protected you, and given you as a covenant of my people. to lighten the eyes of the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out of the dungeon the captives, and out of the dungeon of the dungeon the inhabitants of darkness.

And this healing work will be confirmed by the activity of the Savior Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Is. 42, 6-7).

The biblical foundation of social assistance is made by the prophet Isaiah who mentions

Is this the fast that is pleasing to Me: a man to torment his soul one day? Here is the pleasant fast for Me: untie the chains of wickedness, untie the bonds of bondage, let go of the oppressed and break any yoke, share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless wretched into your house if you see the naked man cover him and not turn your back on your neighbor ... Then you will call on the Lord and He will answer you, you will cry out and He will say: Here I am (Is. 58, 3-9).

Fasting and helping others combine compassion for those who are suffering, thus upholding the gospel. God has made His elect and pleasing to heal the sick and even raise the dead. So we learn that Moses healed Miriam of leprosy, saying, "God heal her". Then Elijah, when he was hosted by a widow during the famine, raised her son, saying, "Lord my God, let the soul of this child return to him" (3Kings 17, 21). Elijah rewarded the widow for her kindness, for she received him and fed him

during the drought, and God blessed and multiplied the flour and oil (Calinic 2011: 18). Another example of philanthropy in the Old Testament is provided by Boaz. This is a rich man who takes care of the poor according to the law of the Old Testament. Ruth, a widowed woman, arrives after her husband's death in the land of Boaz, from where she and her mother-in-law could gather the ears of corn left in the field. After Ruth's marriage to Boaz, she continued to care for her mother-in-law (Ruth 2, 9-16). It is worth mentioning that Ruth can be a role model by caring for her neighbor.

Love for one's neighbor, in Old Testament morality, has the character of a commandment: "to love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19, 18), but this love is not limited to compassion but also to mercy, pity, and benevolence, so there are countless provisions of social, humanitarian order. Our fellow man, our neighbor, must be the object of our care and almsgiving. "I want mercy, not sacrifice" (Hos. 6, 6). Man is the gift of God in which His face is mirrored, that is why he deserves respect and love, regardless of gender, age, degree of disability or social status (Chirilă 2010: 17-18). Man being the image of God in man who is love wants the product of his creation to manifest with love in the spirit of order, justice and communion. Moses received directly from God the ten commandments that present the Moral Code observed until the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ when the new Law will be given. These commandments must be obeyed by all people, with Jews emphasizing learning, study, the conception of community, and the manifestation of charity toward the helpless (Goodman, trans. by Rădulescu 2010: 299).

In the New Testament this quality is placed in a secondary place, the God of Love who reveals himself asks for mercy, sacrifice (Mt. 9, 13). It can be mentioned that the whole faith is based on this love of fellow human beings because God "loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3, 16). The law of love was considered the new law he gave as a command to the disciples. "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 all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13, 34-35). The term philanthropy has broader connotations in the New Testament, meaning God's love for man, and man is called to

“imitate the philanthropy of God.” To describe the love between people the relationship between them, the term agape was introduced and later these forms meant charitable actions. However, there is no clear distinction of terms and in Holy Scripture we find these two forms.

Mary Van Hook (1995) notes that

Biblical commandments provide the basis for two approaches that reflect two important aspects of social assistance: charity and social justice. Charity consists in giving useful answers to specific crises, without trying to change the social structure that creates and perpetuates suffering and oppression (Hook 1995: 4).

Also in the New Testament is introduced the term deaconry which appears in the works of the Holy Fathers with the meanings of:

- table service (Lk. 17, 8; Jn. 12, 2; Lk. 12, 37);
- to be ready to serve (Mt. 25, 42-44);
- community service (Acts 19, 22);
- gathering and distributing collections for the “Saints of Jerusalem”;
- the service of the sacraments - the rank of deacon (Vizitiu 2002: 13).

All four forms of defining love: philanthropy, diakonia, charity, and agape as love between people, have their origin in God in the law of Christ's love, and are found in the New Testament.

In relation to the problems of people with disabilities, an essential aspect is highlighted: God's relationship to human suffering which not only involves the endowment of each person according to His will, so a manifestation of His freedom, but it also requires a healing care.

The love of God is deepened by St. Paul the Apostle, in John 15, 12-13, where it is mentioned “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or lack of clothing, or peril, or sword?” (Pilde 19, 17) And he adds:

I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor masters, nor powers, nor those of now, nor those that will be. Neither height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us, from the love of God, that in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 8, 38-39).

The church has always been close to those in distress. The Savior Jesus Christ tells the Apostles, “You always have the poor with you” (Jn. 12, 8), emphasizing that the Holy Apostles need to take care of the poor. God allowed these needs of people, in order to be helped by others, thus

internalizing the feeling of pity, the need to be helped. This work of the Church is accomplished through Christians, thus keeping alive the connection with God. The fact that man can earn salvation by almsgiving is highlighted when the publican Zacchaeus repents and gives half of his wealth to the poor. This is when Jesus exclaims, "Today salvation has been given to this house" (Lk. 19, 9).

Philanthropy was manifested even by Jesus through miracles performed for example at the wedding in Cana of Galilee by turning water into wine, this being the first miracle, saving the bride and groom from shame. "They were from more troubled families, they didn't have enough wine" (Jn. 2, 1-11). The multiplication of the five loaves and the two fishes is another miracle through which he manifested his love so closely that five thousand men were fed, apart from women and children (Mt. 14, 15-21).

3. Philanthropy in the Holy Church Fathers

Saint John Chrysostom mentions how great is the power of almsgiving:

Great are the wings of almsgiving, pass through the air, leave the moon behind, pass the rays of the sun, ascend to the vaults of heaven. But even there it does not stop, but leaves behind the heavens and the peoples of angels and the hosts of archangels and all the powers above and appears even before the throne of the king.

We learn this even from the Holy Scriptures which say, "Cornelius, your prayers and your alms have gone up before God" (Jn. 2, 1-11). The words "before God" mean, "If you have many sins, do not be afraid, for you have mercy on you. None of the above powers will oppose him. Almsgiving demands its debt, paying in hand" (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2006: 46).

The Savior asks everyone to renounce Himself, take up His cross, and follow Him. It is a sacrifice of love, of service, which leads to salvation. Each one reaches the kingdom of heaven according to how he served on earth, he will be saved or not, according to his deeds:

For I was hungry and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye received me; I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you examined me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw I thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty and I gave you a drink? Or when I saw You a stranger and received You? And the King shall answer and say unto them: Verily I say unto you: Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Mt. 25, 35-40).

Some diseases, disabilities were initially perceived as a punishment of God, for sins, often being judged by people and when the Apostles asked Him: “Teacher, who has sinned, he or his parents, to be born blind ? Jesus answered them: Neither hath he sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (Jn. 9, 2-3).

But there are diseases and disabilities that result from sin, which is why the Savior urges them not to sin anymore.

Paterculus gives us many examples of individual philanthropy. Thus St. Anthony the Athonite, the founder of Russian monasticism, was known to his fellows for the blessings, prayers, and healings that some sick people received. Many of the young people wanted to become disciples by having to work with the Saint and becoming monks. The pious Agapius, seeing St. Anthony's devotion and love for the sick, wanted to follow them. Thus he sits day and night by the bed of the sick, caring for them and praying to God. In this way he dedicated his whole life healing the sick and receiving nothing in return (Patericul Lavrei Caves of Kiev, trans. by Mariova: 25).

Saint Pious Parascheva was known for three great virtues: virginity, almsgiving and prayer. It began with divine prayer and then added fasting and almsgiving. It is mentioned that Saint Parascheva “kept fasting until evening, on fasting days, and when she returned from the Church, she changed her price clothes with those of poor children” (Bălan 1992: 395).

The pious Gregory the Thaumaturgist, starting from the words of the Savior charity “Sell your possessions and give alms: make bags that do not grow old, treasure not diminished in heaven, where theft does not approach, nor moth spoils it” received “the charisms of the Holy Spirit” healing and giving alms.

In the year 368 during the famine; Saint Basil the Great organized philanthropic activities, organized collections, distributed the parental inheritance to the poor and appealed to the rich to come to the aid of the poor. The saint organized free meals for the poor, whether they were Christians or not, Jews or Gentiles (Calinic 2011: 18).

The Holy Martyr Filofteia distributed to the poor, clothes and food that her stepmother sent through her to her father in the field. When the father found out about the girl's deeds, he followed her, and when he saw her, he beat her and hit her on the leg with an ax. The saint died on the spot at only 12 years old. That place was filled with light (<https://ro.>

wikipedia.org/wiki/Sf%C%A2nta_Muceni%C8%9B%c4%83Filofteia_de_la_Arge%C8%99).

Saint John Chrysostom teaches what almsgiving means

while you are silent, she is present and defends you; But, better said, while you shut up, thousands and thousands of voices thank you. We have so many good things from almsgiving and we neglect it and we are lazy! Give bread according to your strength! Don't you have bread? Give me a penny! Don't you have a penny? Give a glass of cold water! Don't you have that? You cry with the grieving one and you got your reward. You don't have to do good out of obligation, because that is no longer good and is no longer rewarded by God (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2006: 46).

The saints see the image of God in the sick, the poor, the helpless. In this sense, it is mentioned in a story how a believer named Iannis, “lover of God” who lived in the twenty century, how a disabled person perceives, in his case, a child with Down syndrome. He addresses a nurse with the words

Hey, Kaliopita, how did they leave this angel? The poor parents, if they had known that this angel meant to them the ticket to Heaven and to eternity, would not have left him. How can you leave such a treasure, my child? Our Christ, my Kaliopita, said it was love. And love, you know, has a sacrifice in it. Without sacrificial love is like an empty, spoiled tin, as my mother used to say. My Christ Kaliopita, said that he who has no sacrificial love is empty inside. If I knew, my good child, what treasures God is constantly sending to man to save him, we would leap for joy. Behold, this angel is such a treasure. I'll tell you a secret. If a good family were found to adopt him, then not only would the family receive innumerable heavenly blessings, but also through the sacrifice of their love to embrace this sick angel with the body, they would heal him. Because our Triune God is merciful and sorrowful ... isn't it strange, my Kaliopita, that today's people care more about animals and don't care about these children? I'm not saying we shouldn't love birds and animals. And we must take care of them, but all the more we must take care of the suffering man, who is the image of God. Today we must become merciful Samaritans, so that we can give our lives for the good of the other, if the need demands it. Do not forget this, especially you, the medical sisters, who in your work always have to do with human pain” (Makris, trans. by Nuțescu 2012: 17).

The love of the Saints for the sick results both from their deeds and from their words. Saint Paisie Aghioritul says that: “those who care for sick people, if they have no sins, are suddenly sanctified, and if they have sins through this ministry they are shown from them in proportion to their love”, and Saint Gregory the Theologian teaches us to “behave with the sick as we are with a saint, because our patience can save us” (Teșu 2017: 58).

Summary: The conclusion that emerges from this paper is that forms of social assistance existed before Christianity being imposed by certain objective needs that arose at one time and based on the natural human feeling of helping any suffering person. In Christianity it is established that philanthropic activity which is no longer done occasionally but is part of the Christian mission of serving the Church and appears as a duty of every Christian. God is a “lover of men,” and man is called to imitate the philanthropy of God, the Savior being the central figure in the model of this philanthropy.

The moral law instituted in the Old Testament is superior to the moral law of contemporary peoples, and God's mercy requires his sons to be merciful, “for I will hear them, for I am merciful” (Ex. 22, 27).

In the New Testament, Christ asks everyone to renounce themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him. He actually asks everyone to sacrifice themselves like Him, but the sacrifice required is that of love, of service. Saint Basil the Great opens a new stage of the development of social assistance in the Church, he reveals a different perspective on the disease and the sick. If until then the sick or the helpless old man did not have the right to participate in social life, Saint Basil the Great introduces a new Christian conception full of understanding and compassion for the vulnerable. Philanthropy mentions that some theologians are nothing but the Gospel brought to the present day because only in the Gospel do we find Christ identified with any suffering man.

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