

THE EMERGENCE OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND VOLUNTEERING IN CHURCHES AS SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. This paper represents a brief overview of the psychosocial problems related to the emergence of prosocial behavior and volunteering in social organizations under the Romanian Orthodox Church. We discuss the concepts of emergence of prosocial behavior, volunteering, philanthropy and social action in church. Watching the social work practices developed by churches, it can be said that the emergence of prosocial behavior is higher among people with higher level of competence and with a Christian spirit enriched by sacred values and the predisposition toward volunteering. Church social assistance organizations are community actors, particularly important in the clotting of volunteer resources and prosocial behaviors.

Keywords: emergence of prosocial behavior, voluntary organizations, church social services.

Introduction

Our world is a pluralistic, secular and mercantile one, in which every individual often pursues his self-interest and seeks to solve problems only by his own means. During this period Church is called to be actively involved in solving individuals and society's problems. This is the situation especially at EU level, due to the position and peculiar means under an ontological mission to serve the neighbor and its unique experience that it has acquired, especially in promoting prosocial behavior.

In everyday life, most people conform to generally accepted social norms and act accordingly with prevailing social values. Some distance themselves and the one who deviates from the main rules and social values becomes the so-called anti-social person. At the opposite side is placed the category of people with prosocial

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behavior. People who have a prosocial behavior are persons who do not infringe, but instead reinforce social norms and values.

"Prosocial behavior is directed toward helping, protecting, supporting, developing others, without expectation of external rewards or benefits for the action of giving help. A. Baum, JD Fisher, JE Singer understand by prosocial behaviors intentional those acts that could have positive consequences for others, without anticipating any reward. Hans Werner Bierhoff (1987) mentions two necessary and sufficient conditions, in his opinion, to identify prosocial behaviors: the intention to help others, freedom of choice, help outside professional obligations." (Neculau, 1996, p. 445).

Prosocial behavior is based on altruism which can be regarded as a behavior that is intentionally done outside professional obligations and is aimed at supporting, preserving and promoting social values. Such prosocial behavior includes varied phenomena such as helping others, compassion, philanthropy, self-sacrifice. Helping, protecting and supporting the development of others occupies a central position in the prosocial behavior system where man is the supreme social value.

Not every behavior with positive consequences in the axiological plan can be characterized as prosocial. It must have intention and has to be done consciously, and the person who is facing the emergence of prosocial behavior should not get any external bonuses such as getting a prize, medals or public congratulations.

"Depending on the attribution of responsibility for the critical situation that requires prosocial behavior and the perception of responsibility to find a solution, Brikman distinguishes four models of helping:

1. the moral model (in case of high responsibility for the situation and also for finding the solution);
2. the enlightenment model (who is in a critical situation has a high responsibility for the situation that he is in, but has no responsibility or low responsibility in imagining a solution to the crisis);
3. the compensator model (low responsibility for the critical position in which you find yourself in, but high responsibility for solving the problem)
4. the medical model (both in relation to the problematic situation, the individual has low responsibility and low responsibility in overcoming it).

Brikman considers that the compensatory model is the best choice. The receiving aid acts as an active social agent. *The one that helps himself, is the one that is helped.*" (Neculau, 1996, p. 446).

The way in which help influences the actual achievement of prosocial behavior

Demanding with too much insistence, ultimately the help will be delayed or no longer will be offered; moderation in seeking the help is more effective than insistence. When help is requested too strongly, the psychological reaction occurs.

Aggressive insistence threatens the freedom of choice and thus causes psychic reaction and therefore individuals will avoid helping.

The proportion of prosocial behavior depends undoubtedly on many factors, including the socio-cultural system and the social costs involved by providing help. If the resources involved for providing aid and the actual cost is higher, the probability of helping others is reduced and the prosocial behavior is less likely to emerge (Neculau, 1996).

We do, however, distinguish between the actual cost and the cost of pre-calculated (paid) help. Past experience allows us to evaluate the real cost of our behaviors and enable us to anticipate future costs for our actions. Other situational factors can also introduce serious corrections and sometimes anticipate a disproportionate high cost compared to the actual cost. In such cases, the tendency to help those in need is low. We take into consideration both material and moral costs: low self-esteem, prestige in front of others etc. This is why precisely those who most need the help are avoided. In an attempt to help others we can fail and reach a situation as difficult, if not more critical, than the victim.

As more the individual is competent and has more control over the situation, it is more likely he will assist. For a person competent in calling for help, the cost of pro-social behaviors is lower than for people who do not know how to intervene and who have no competence.

Exposure to prosocial models increases the likelihood of human self-help, the more we promote social values through our actions the stronger we will influence others towards achieving pro-social behaviors.

Society based on a market economy, on competition, selfishness is considered normal and altruism deviant. Unfocused actions aimed to the good of others, to support the ideals and sacred symbols appear in the eyes of many as having hidden selfish motives. Because of selfishness, competition and competitive EU-wide spread of prosocial behaviors becomes particularly difficult.

The emergence of prosocial behavior is facilitated within voluntary organizations, including those sponsored by the Church. Church offers through its clerical staff, which has the status of a leader in a society, community mobilization and training people in volunteering, favoring the emergence of prosocial behaviors for direct involvement in solving problems that can arise at individual and at the community level (Zamfir, 1997).

“Volunteering is an activity of public interest, carried on by own initiative by any person for the benefit of others, without receiving a material compensation; public work is done in areas such as health and social services, human rights protection, medical services, cultural, artistic, educational, scientific, humanitarian, religious, philanthropic, sports, environmental, social and community.” (Volunteering Law no. 195 in 2001, updated by Law no. 339 / July 17, 2006).

The defining characteristics for a volunteer are:

- the activity is conducted by a person (physical, not legal)
- activity is held for the benefit of someone else - a person, family, group, community or society in general;
- activity is carried out without receiving material reward on the amount of work performed;
- activity is carried on its own initiative.

Volunteering should not be confused with mandatory patriotic work or community service. Volunteering is a mutually beneficial exchange between man and community.

The modern form of volunteer emerged after First World War, when the need for solidarity and willingness to assist each other was felt at the most higher levels. Therefore, many organizations arose, such as the U.S. Peace Corps, German Development Service or the UN Volunteers program (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1995).

In Romania volunteering was regulated for the first time quite late, in 2001, by the Volunteering Law No. 195/2001, published in Official Gazette nr. 642 from 30 August 2002, a law quite incomplete, which led in 2006 to a modification and update by the Law no. 339/2006.

The emergence of prosocial behavior and volunteering in the absence of a legislative framework had suffered severely; there are many organizations that were active in this context. The Romanian Orthodox Church was one of the institutions that activated voluntarily and cultivated prosocial behavior among believers for providing social services and philanthropy.

Addressing social services in religious communities is difficult in some aspects. First of all, religious communities are formed around spiritual principles and some had to expose spiritual powers that cannot be exhibited and explained by any human logic. Sociology aims to provide logical explanations of social phenomena and facts. It was believed, and it is still believed, that religion has offered explanations based on ignorance, the fear of the unknown or simply gave dogmas for the human need to have rules. But many facts and social phenomena have spiritual explanations, as in the case of prosocial behavior promoted by the teaching of faith.

Philanthropy and Church social services are based precisely on the emergence of prosocial behavior and volunteering, both in specialized institutions and in the initiatives to help the individuals or communities. Church is one of the oldest institutions in the world, sometimes being accused of conservatism. However, it is this institution that has operated and conceptualized the idea of prosocial behavior and volunteering. These two concepts were derived as the concepts of Christian compassion and charity that the church's teaching is based on love of the neighbor and the sense of duty towards his neighbor.

Similar to the obligations towards himself, the obligations toward the neighbor are included in 3 outstanding virtues: honor or respect neighbor; the love for neighbor

and justice towards neighbor (Foundations of the Orthodox Christian Faith, 1952, p. 476).

Who is our neighbor? The answer is given to us by the Savior Christ in the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 29-37), and this response can be summed up like this: Our neighbor is every person without any kind of distinction (ibid. p.476). According to the Christian teaching, all people are children of the same Heavenly Father. We are all created by the *image and likeness* of God, we are all the same being, descended from the same single pair of humans (Adam and Eve), we are under the same condemnation of original sin and we are saved in the same sacrifice on the Cross and the same call, the same eternal life. Based on Christian teachings about the equality of all men before God and about equal rights for everyone to come to life, gradually it has come to the belief about the right of each person for the goods of this life.

Honoring the neighbor as honoring yourself; it is the recognition of the worthiness as an act that each of our neighbors has from God and before God as men. The obligation to honor our neighbor rests on the same grounds as debt veneration to himself, people have the duty to recognize each other's worth and qualities with whom they have been endowed. Against the act of not honoring our neighbor, we despise him by using degraded things, as well as by not recognizing his rights.

Love for the neighbor is the virtue by which Christians wants and desires temporal and eternal goodness for his neighbor, and also tries to do this is better as he can. The Spirit and Christian life are fully in accordance with this doctrine. Therefore this is why The Saviour calls it the "mark of Christianity." "By all this will know that you are my disciples, if you will have love inside of you" (John 13: 35).

Love is an outstanding debt; it is necessarily for the salvation of a Christian. Love for God and neighbor is the fulfillment of the divine law, and prosocial behavior and volunteering are two levers that can be considered essential in reaching the ultimate goal of every human being, the salvation. The salvation of believers is possible through divine grace, faith and good works towards one another, and good work can be summarized in layman language by prosocial behavior and voluntary social organizations of the church.

Church social welfare can be defined similarly, indicating that church adds to these definitions the sacramental size, religion. Based on Christian mercy and charity, church throughout history has developed and continuously improved support services for its believers, not only in terms of social and economic parameters, but also in terms of the expectations of believers, actively participating in both the provision and consumption of those services. It may be noted that social church appeared with the first forms of organization of Christian religious life. Church developed and currently develops social services both in empirical forms of organization as well as in modern forms based on scientific criteria, depending on the options and the expectations available from its faithful shepherds (Apostol, 1992).

Church, as a divine-human institution, aims at achieving welfare and progress in what regards faith and spirituality. In order to achieve this goal, church faces social problems of the people, issues that hinder human development process. As a result, since the dawn of Christianity church has created its own structure of intervention based on the emergence of a pro-social behavior. Problems that could arise in a community and which the state is trying to solve with the intervention of specialized services are the problems of the church. Based on its historical tradition, the church is expected to get involved and to be currently active and professional as an alternative to the state's social services.

Due to its social structure, credibility, morality and teaching activities, church justifies its intervention in solving social issues. Historically, politically and socially speaking there is not a concrete support system, thus church carries the social activity based on its own resources and limits.

Church, along with its philanthropic organizations, can support in a positive way the needs of the community. Church can bring together people from its area of influence in order to discuss plans and strategies for changing problematic situations within the community. Church implements programs aiming to improve the organization of the community, organizes cleaning and sanitation activities of the area, or coordinates vocational centers for the youngsters in the community. The Church is called to form leaders, to contribute with human and material resources in order help people in need, and to be able to respond to any kind of situation that occurs in the community (Apostol, 1992).

During this period, the Romanian Orthodox Church goes through the process of modernizing the social services that are provided. The Romanian Orthodox Church has the ability to gather resources and community members, and to provide social services for disadvantaged categories within its specific religious communities. On the other hand, the Romanian Orthodox Church is a serious partner in the social dialogue both at Community or national level together with other stakeholders, in what regards the process of formulating and implementing social policies.

After the national revolution in 1989, The Romanian Orthodox Church was reorganized from this point of view, concluding cooperation agreements with social institutions from the public sphere that were materialized in fruitful collaborations and results. In this sense, we can evoke the reinstatement of religion classes in the school curriculum, social and religious assistance in prisons, hospitals, child care organizations, etc. These actions outline the fact that Church plays an important role in relation with state, regarding social policies and their implementation within society.

Currently, church implements social activities through its own system based on laws issued by the state promoting social policies and social protection measures within society. A large part of the services are provided on a voluntary basis, with material and financial resources obtained from donations offered by the members

of the religious community. Finally, we have to mention that church also implements social service projects having a relative modest financial resource.

To illustrate the above mentioned, we have chosen *Filantropia* Association from Oradea as a case study, with its activity based just on feelings of mutual human love, faith, volunteering and prosocial behavior. *Filantropia* Association from Oradea is a nonprofit organization that has the mission to support the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Oradea in its social and philanthropic work made for communities and their members. As a diocesan organization, *Filantropia* Association from Oradea is a member of the Filantropia Federation of the Romanian Patriarchate.

Filantropia Association from Oradea (2011) develops various programs based on volunteering and prosocial behavior, for example: Philanthropy Resource Center, Support Programs for Children and Family, Support Programs for People with Disabilities, Roma Community Integration, Education Programs, Programs for Young Volunteers, other initiatives, patronage or sponsorship programs. These programs are embodied in specific services such as Multiple Sclerosis Center in Bihor County, Nurtury Center in Girișu de Cris, Residential Center for Persons with Disabilities in Bratca, Program Table of Joy, Home Assistance for the Elderly, Youth Exchanges, Tearoom Philanthropy, For Christmas and Easter Adopt a Soul, Scholarships for Children and Youth, SM Cycling Tour, Race Ducks, Pink Campaign, Wheelchair for Disabled, Caravan Philanthropy, Philanthropy Soirees.

This is just a part of the activities undertaken by voluntary members of different religious communities, actions based on a pro-social behavior, with limited financial resources but with great energy and selflessly invested in the happiness and welfare of others.

In conclusion, we can say that the emergence of prosocial behavior is higher among people with a high level of competence and with a Christian spirit, enriched by sacred values of helping the neighbor and predisposition towards volunteering; social and religious organizations are the most important actors within the community in what regards the mixture between volunteer resources and prosocial behavior.

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