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Review of the Volume "Filantropie si servicii sociale profesionalizate în Biserica Ortodoxã Românã. Cercetare sociologicã realizatã în Arhiepiscopia Iasilor [Philanthropy and professionalized social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Sociological research conducted in the Archdiocese of Iasi]" by Petronela Polixenia Nistor

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Abstract: *This paper is a review for the volume "Philanthropy and professionalized social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Sociological research conducted in the Archdiocese of Iaşi" published by PhD Lecturer Petronela Polixenia Nistor at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Publishing House from Iaşi in 2020.*

Keywords: *philanthropy, professionalised social services, faith-based organizations, Christian social work.*

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The University Lecturer PhD Petronela Polixenia Nistor is the author of extensive research work called "Philanthropy and professionalized social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Sociological research conducted in the Archdiocese of Iasi". The volume is published at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University Publishing House from Iaşi, in 2020. The text concentrates a doctoral research thesis that explores the intersection of sociology and theology through the concept of a post-secular society and faith-based organizations on 368 abundant of informations pages.

The terms *charity* and *philanthropy* are often used interchangeably in contemporary speech and religious settings, despite their distinct meanings and content. For a clearer definition and framing of this, we must specify that charity has the meaning of the attitude of helping the poor, disinterestedly, so that they can make a living. The objective is to lessen the effects of a particular social problem, including voluntary poverty, as laziness, and vices, while philanthropy aims to eliminate the root cause of the problem. Philanthropy aims to influence the poor to be capable of educating themselves, participating in work, ensuring necessary things for survival, becoming autonomous, and assisting themselves. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines philanthropy as "benevolence to other members of humanity, manifested by acts of compassion or gifts of material value made for humanitarian purposes", and in the same time "the activity undertaken by the organizations which support with funds such acts or donations".

The research paper focuses on the Romanian Orthodox Church and aims to explain the features of the church's social-philanthropic activity. The goal is to set up a pattern of Christian social work based on the uniquenesss of Orthodoxy. The work recognises the importance of the church's social engagement in a post-secular society and highlights the need for creative and long-term activation of resources in this context. Overall, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding and development of the church's role in social action within the contemporary Romanian context.

Faith-based organizations serve the needs of members of their own religious communities largely through social services and charity endeavors. They operate as private companies or as affiliates of religious cults. In the light of the growing awareness that policies to separate social services from the religious dimension and to secularise them are ineffective, the efficiency of these services is under scrutiny. Originating in the United States, this tendency is currently extending to Europe, where religious communities are viewed as possible collaborators in public social services.

The first chapter, ”Philanthropy and charity – origins and perspectives”, begins with the definition and understanding of the terms philanthropy and charity, a brief history of philanthropy in our country, being historically exposed the first assistant activities carried out by the Church. The relationship between the state and the Church regarding the provision of social services was analyzed, the Romanian sociological and theological literature regarding the social-philanthropic activity of the Church was reviewed. Also, the author had inserted discussions on conceptual differentiation between social assistance, as a form of self-help carried out within the organized framework, and in public or private institutions licensed for this purpose, made available to beneficiaries through social assistance professionals and social assistance with a significant spiritual dimension, performed spontaneously or in an organized setting and through people who are often not specialists. Towards the end of the chapter, the need for professionalization of philanthrophic social assistance activities and their translation to social assistance activities, was emphasized.

”Social-philanthropic activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church - Current landmarks”, the second chapter, is a broad reflection of the social-philanthropic projects and programs carried out by the Church at national level and in the Archdiocese of Iasi. The main researches carried out in the Romanian literature on the position of the Church towards certain social problems are offerd, such as: violence in the family, community development and rural modernization, the HIV/AIDS phenomenon, the problem of chronic patients and the rights of the human being, philanthropy and professionalised social services in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

The third chapter, entitled ”Organization based on belief in post-secular society and social work”, is dedicated to clarifying theoretical perspectives on post-secular society, followed by the presentation of the importance that a faith-based organization has in such a society. A number of particularities of the charitable professionalization and social work training process were presented, pointing out certain discrepancies between the specifics of social work offered by civil and religious associations.

Fourth chapter, ”Methodology of research on the stage of development and institutionalization of charity in the Archdiocese of Iasi”, presents the methodological blend of subjective and quantitative strategies underpining the experimental inquire. The qualitative study was based on semi-structured interviews of 37 individuals, like clerics, social specialists, monks or nuns, included within the social-philanthropic action of the Church. October 2018 - January 2019 interviews conducted in the Archdiocese of Iasi have been analyzed utilizing a methodology specific to

Grounded Theory, and the analysis resulted in a theoretical explanatory model on the specific activity as a faith-based charitable organization offering philanthropic services. The questionnaires were applied during December 2018 – February 2019, to 578 priests, social workers, volunteers and other persons engaged in the social and philanthropic activity of the B.O.R.., and a sample of 420 beneficiaries of the social-philanthropic services offered by the Church.

"Professionalization and Philanthropy in the Archdiocese of Iasi" is the fifth chapter. The presentation of the research results and their interpretation is based on the analysis of empirical data obtained through qualitative interview research. The categories obtained were: social problems of the Orthodox Christian community, philanthropy, charity and service of the neighbour in the communications of the persons participating in the philanthropic activity, motivation of the spirituality for the practices, carrying out the social and philanthropic activities within the B.O.R., sources of funds for philanthropic works, the professionalisation of the work of charity, the peculiarities of Christian social assistance (based on Christian moral values).

The results of the quantitative research based on the survey, conducted with people committed to the social-philanthropic work of the Church, gave us the opportunity to develop reflections on the role of social-philanthropic assistance offered by the B.O.R. in solving the social, psychological and spiritual needs of the beneficiaries. The results of the research carried out by questionnaire-based inquiry among the beneficiaries were the basis of considerations regarding the importance and role of philanthropy, as a form of materialization of the social good, in community and personal life; in particular, we have paid special attention to the danger of creating an addiction of beneficiaries to the care services. There was also an attention to another discussed danger, which we would define as the unresponsibility of these beneficiaries, as well, with a severe impact on their social integration or insertion as individuals possessing the skills to ensure their material self-sufficiency, but also spiritual growth.

In today society, charity is professionalized by means of the development in religious organizations, in continuation and in addition of philanthropic activities, of professional social assistance, relying on the compassionate calling and on a series of specific Christian values, which are particularized in order to be consistent with the universal principles of social assistance. Social assistance provided by faith-based organizations adheres to state-imposed quality requirements, but their focus is on the importance of

the beneficiary as a human being, the interaction and connection setting apart religiously based practice from secular practice.

The findings of this research highlight the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church continues to express its spiritual ethos by pursuing a philanthropy that incorporates aspects characteristic to social assistance, and enhanced from an ontological level with distinctive Christian virtues, like: compassion, mercy and service to the neighbour.

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