

## **The Biblical Fundamentation of Social Assistance in the Globalization Era**

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### **Abstract**

Dans cet étude l'auteur veut souligner que l'assistance sociale à l'origine chrétienne ou profane n'est pas seulement l'expression de l'amour du prochain mais elle est à la fois une manière non déclarée de la société de se protéger soi-même en offrant un minimum d'existence aux pauvres. Pour l'espace européen on dit que la philanthropie aurait ses racines dans le message évangélique qui vraiment suggère que le bien-être doit appartenir à tous. On insiste aussi sur le fait qu'avant la chrétienté, dans le judaïsme, pour protéger les pauvres on commençait par la limitation de la pauvreté en pardonnant les dettes des pauvres tous les six ans et surtout à l'année Jubilé. On continue aussi avec la motivation religieuse de l'acte philanthropique en proposant une réflexion sérieuse sur la dignité de la personne humaine.

Whoever is interested in following the Evangelic principles is advised by the Bible to love his fellow man as he loves himself. In everyday life, the command of love means to voluntarily take part the happiness of the others because this does not suppose any effort. In fact, as poet Ana Blandiana underlined "*man never laughs alone and never cries in front of the others*" because happiness means community. Indeed, to laugh all by yourself might be a sign of mental alienation. It is also true that man is seldom sentenced to cry by himself as crying might be an act of penitence. It is more difficult to see those who cry, not because of the penitence but because they are hopeless and joyless and because their fears have grown and sadness overwhelmed them. Thus, to take care of your fellow man is, from both, Christian and human perspective, to

become as solidary as you can with every man, woman and child. Any of these persons, although they are in different stages of their lives are unique in their individuality.<sup>1</sup> Christian belief cannot be reduced to a pure intellectual dimension because this would mean to simply transform it in another different opinion on life. Christian belief is about the desire to do only the best for your fellow man even to the point of renouncing social inequalities there where they are the most obvious.

It is necessary to underline that social assistance, as I said, materializes itself through the love shown to the fellow man, love that can have as grain, besides the sincere love for man, some other reasons, although we do not always have the courage to admit it. Of course, the main reason is love for your fellow man, the true wish to help him regain his dignity, but there is another reason, as important as the first one. This is society's desire to identify the most efficient means by which it can protect itself from those who don't have the resources to live decently and might be tempted to make crimes that disturb more or less the common life of the society. When I first travelled to Australia, in early 1991, I was very surprised to find out that thanks to a very efficient legal system which supports the unemployed, the number of crimes was very small if we are to compare it with other countries. A local told me that in case a person was not able to cope only with the allowance received from the authorities he asked for a surplus, and, if it was on fair grounds, he got it. Even more, because one of the biggest crimes was to set the woods on fire, the one who denounced such a crime got a great reward.

Of course that besides these two reasons, at the basis of the charitable act must be the principle of common wealth. If God made the Earth with all that it has for the common use of all inhabitants it is logical that all the goods on it must accrue to everyone under common justice.<sup>2</sup> The Earth is thus the universal patrimony of humankind and it is meant to shelter

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<sup>1</sup> Tiziano Salvatera, *L'insegnamento Sociale della Chiesa Catholica*, in „Studies”, nr. 3, Craiova, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Conciliul Vatican II, *Const.Past.Gaudium et spes*, 69: AAS 58, 1966, 1090

everyone, men and animals and theoretically there should be no one to be excluded or to over privilege himself.<sup>3</sup> Because nature and environment belong to everyone all members of the society should try, of course each by his own capacity, to make everybody part of this good. In doing this they should also take into account that good as well as prosperity and wellness have a common destination. When we engage in the accomplishment of the common wealth, we should consider the universal destination of all goods<sup>4</sup>, even when our engagement is entirely based on humanitarian grounds. Or, if we admit that the goods have a common destination, a common effort from the community is imposed in order to facilitate the access of all its members to them. Among others, the social protection of those left aside relates itself to some fundamental values for the human civilization such as: *truth, freedom, justice and love*.<sup>5</sup> I consider that from these four, justice and love are prevalent or at least they should be. Justice appears as one of the main principles of humanity and it stands as a central point in the Roman ethics too, which recommended that each was given what he deserved (*sum quique tribuere*). The Roman ethics also recommended that no one should offend no one (*neminem laedere*) and to honestly live (*honeste vivere*) in the idea that he/she will not endanger the goods and honour of his/her fellow man. Thus, the principles of the Roman ethics advise us to find a real equilibrium between the personal interests and those of the fellow man. Everything came out of a well calculated interest stated in the *do ut des* meaning I give you so that you will give me. In consequence, from duty to love is a long way.

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<sup>3</sup> Isidor Mărtincă, *Compendiul Doctrinei Sociale a Bisericii*- manual de lucru pentru studenți, (traducere și editare) [*The Compendium of Social Doctrine Of Church –handbook for students' usage*], Universitatea din București Publishing House, 2005. p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

### **The Biblical Grounds of Charitable Act and Social Assistance**

The ancient Jewish people had as a guide Moses' law. And although they were focused on the specific and the conditions offered by an entirely agrarian community, they also mentioned something about the poor, especially the foreigners, the widows and the orphans. Like no other people in the world, the Jews were compelled to protect the slaves too, the foreigners as well as the local ones. In the book of Exodus we are advised to protect the poor in many ways. An essential motivation for the social assistance of the marginalized groups (consisting in widows, orphans, foreigners and slaves) was the command of love. This involved identification with these groups so that one could love these people as he loved himself. The legislator wanted not necessarily to incur pity but love for the three social categories most often exposed to poverty and who badly needed social protection from the community. The first category was made of the foreigners who didn't have the means to buy properties in the adoption country; the second category was made of the widows - who were very numerous in those times as result of the so common wars and the third one was made of the orphan children.

### **Ways to Apply the Principles of the Law Regarding the Social Protection**

First of all the legislator stoke on the idea that faith and obedience to God will completely transform man by making him interested in voluntarily helping the poor, as the men of poor conditions are not mentioned. In order to have the guarantee that man will entirely respect the law of the social protection, the legislator threatened with the divine intervention, saying: If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. (Exodus 22, 23 - 24). Thus, those who do not have the adequate behaviour towards this social segment are menaced to be approbated with the *lex talionis* meaning an eye

for an eye.<sup>6</sup> As one may see, the first way of social protection was following the divine justice, having the premise that the main blame for the suffering of some persons was held by the society in which they lived. That is why, before enunciating the ways in which the poor could be helped, the legislator recommended the complete eradication of poverty but there will be no poor among you (for the Lord will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess (Deuteronomy 15, 4). At the first sight, the command seems to be completely absurd for the modern lecturer of this text. And he would be right because what society or country in this world, no matter how rich it is, can boast that there are no poor people today? In this case, the legislator wanted to draw attention on the fact that poverty is most of the times caused by acts of injustice, starting with the unjust distribution of the lands.

Before going into details about the old Hebrew ways of helping the needy I should mention the reason for which they did it. It is well known that when the man has no motivation, he does not involve himself too much in whatever he is doing. At the old Jewish people, the property itself or better said the right to own land was limited and relative. This was based on the grounds that the one and only owner of the land is God (Yahweh) and men were considered to be only some aliens on the land they had in temporary use. Because of the fact that in their community they all considered themselves brothers having as Father the Absolute Owners and as common ancestor Abraham, they were supposed to divide as equal as possible the temporary property. Or, at least, they had to do things in such a manner that everybody benefited: rich, poor, slaves or free people, foreigners or locals. Another reason, also on a religious base, was that Israel's God was seen as a Good, Compassionate Father, full of sympathy towards his people / children and the one who had pity for those in need was doing nothing else but imitating God – his Father (Proverbs 14, 31). Because the law commanded it, for ancient Jews the pity for

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<sup>6</sup> John Currid, *Comentrii asupra cărții Exodul, vol. II [Commentary on the Book of Exodus, tom II]*, Oradea, 2003, p. 19-40

their fellow men had serious grounds and was not on option. The one who followed the command to have mercy on the fellow man was in fact directly honouring God who made the rich and the poor.

### **The Limitation of Poverty**

The first step in social assistance was thus the attempt to reduce poverty. It might be said that this was part of the law's program which was implemented on the society of the times. Thanks to the numerous commands having a humanitarian character in the Jewish law, the individual poverty or the collective one was not that extended as it used to be to some other people that did not have such well defined laws regarding the care for the people. Still, when the lessening of the poverty and suffering was not satisfying the prophets who explained the law, tried to make sensitive those who were able to help their brothers. Of course, it was not considered that complete eradication of poverty and suffering was possible. It was known even since then that human nature is inclined towards the excessive accumulation as well as it has the tendency to do injustice to his fellow men in different ways. We may add to this some people's incapacity to properly organize their time or their goods and that is why the Mosaic law warned that there will always be poor people in the country (and in the world - Deuteronomus 15, 11). It might be easily inferred that in those times an well organized assistance, in the modern meaning of the word, as well as the concern for the one in distress or with material needs was reduced just to the men's persuasion to make charitable acts. These were in fact the alms which, in those times (1500 - 1400 BC) represented a huge progress in the area of the social protection. The first method to limitate the poverty was thus the compulsory act of charity:" If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be

grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deuteronomy 15, 7- 11). In order to determine people to help the poor, the legislator conditioned the divine blessing with the care for the fellow men. Thus, even the borrowing was seen as a charitable act. According to the same legislation, man was compelled to use the goods that were thought to have been gained through the mercy and help of God for helping those who really needed it and not the „false" paupers or those who did not want to work. The charitable act, as a commentator of book Deuteronomy states, is on the list of God's priorities<sup>7</sup> Who seems to identify Himself with the paupers when He says: "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed" (Proverbs 19, 17).

Another method of social help ordered by the law was the imposition of the sabbatical holidays, the most important of them being: *the Sabbatical day, the Sabbatical year (the 7th)* and *the Jubilee year (the 50th)*. The material help of the paupers in the sabbatical year meant: firstly in this day, the slaves, the paupers and the day workers together with the rich and the free people rested (Exodus 20, 9). The slave was treated now with mercy by his owner who was not allowed to be severe with his workers. Also, in this year, the slave had the right to ask for his freedom. When he was released, the owner was compelled to give him a part of the crops, cattle, clothes and other products, so that, at least for a while, the former slave will not materially depend on anybody and he will be able to live on his own until he will find a source from which to gain his living. This precaution appears as something unique in the world as it is a respect shown to human dignity as history never mentions similar cases to other people. Even more, Moses' law forbid the catch of any running slave and imposed the asylum for as long as the running slave will be able to find

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<sup>7</sup> William MacDonald, *Comentariul biblic al credinciosului-Vechiul Testament [Biblical Commentary of the Believer-The Old Testament]*, Oradea, 2002, p. 192.

a place were to set down. Thus, the modern employer should be honest and just with his employees showing them compassion any time it is needed.

One more way to insure a minimum social protection, and also a unique case, as far as we know, was the fact that each 7th year was dedicated to helping the paupers by erasing all their debts from the last six years. Thus, the calling off of the debts was motivated by the fact that in that year the land was not being exploited by the agriculture. Thus, if the land was not sowed, nor harvested, in a country which was entirely agrarian and men did not have any other incomes except for the agricultural and animal products, they didn't also have money to pay their debts. The ecological aspect of that precaution of not working the land should also be underlined. It appears as a something new in the agriculture of the time. By not exploiting the land, it was able to „recover” itself. Nowadays it is well known that this method is used by the countries with a big economic potential as well as by the poor countries (although in an involuntary manner) who do not have the technical means to work it. Thus, by not working the land in the sabbatical year, as well as in the Jubilee year, two main objectives were obtained: first, the agricultural potential was restored and secondly – with an obvious humanitarian character – the slaves were spared from doing all the harsh labour by being given their freedom. The largest number was that of the slaves who increased their debts and, at the date of payment they were insolvent and that is why they were forced to sell themselves or the members of their families to the creditors.<sup>8</sup> At a certain date of the sabbatical year they could enjoy the full freedom and the substantial gifts their former owners gave them. From a social perspective, another positive aspect of this year is the fact that the lands that still had crops were left exclusively for the use of the freed slaves, of the widows, orphans and foreigners. One should also keep in mind the fact that in the Jubilee or Joy year, the 50th, people had the obligation to return all the real estates: the land and the houses. Even if the exact application of the law created some

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<sup>8</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Les Institutions de l'Ancien Testament*, Les editions du Cerf, Paris, 1989, vol. I, p. 261.

social problems, that unique legislation represented a great social value as it promoted the respect for the human dignity<sup>9</sup> suggesting in the same time that man has the calling for freedom and no one has the right to subdue him forever.

Even if the primary goal of not working the land in the sabbatical years was the restoration of the soil, much more important was the social – charitable aspect of helping the paupers and those who did not have lands. The social help in an exclusively agrarian society began with the renunciation of gathering all the crops, all the grapes, the fruits, the vegetables or anything else that could have been a first aid for the paupers (Leviticus 19, 9 – 10; 23; 22; Deuteronomus 24, 19). Besides this practice, another form of social protection in the antique Jewish world was that of creating a financial capital, in gold or silver coins by the contribution of each man older than 20. This fund was hoarded up at the sanctuary and its precise destination was to be given to the paupers, especially to the widows who lost their husbands in the wars as well as to the orphans. To these financial aids was added the organization of feasts for the paupers or for those who did not have a good material situation. These were organized on the occasion of some holidays or important events in the life of the families. The feasts were usually organized near the sanctuary as this was a public place.<sup>10</sup>

Another new idea brought in by the biblical legislation of Moses was the obligation to pay correctly and on time the person that was a day-labour: You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns; you shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the Lord, and it be sin in you (Deuteronomy 24, 14 – 15). This command has a humanitarian character as payment for the work made was

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<sup>9</sup> Jubileu [*Jubilee*], in *Dicționar biblic [Biblical Dictionary]*, Stephanus Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Vezi mai amănunțit: **Poverty**, în *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3 [For details see: **Poverty** in *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Part 3, Parable-Zuzim, Inter-Varsitty Press, 1998, p. 1254-1255.

exactly the money that a person needed to live together with his family. It should be underlined this detail as there are plenty the cases, at least in my country, when some employers wrong their workers by not paying them according to the work they did or by exploiting them as if they were slaves. They invented new diabolic forms of making them to do free work: the so called *testing period* of one to three months after which they fire the personnel on the basis of not corresponding to their demands and of course without paying it. The abuse of not paying the workers, no matter on what grounds, it is severely condemned by prophets as Jeremiah who says: *Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages; (Jeremiah 22, 13).*<sup>11</sup>

### **The Attitude of the Prophets Towards the Pauper Categories**

The prophets' charitable preoccupations could also be seen in their moralizing speeches and although for the moment they didn't have the power to change too much on the long run they contributed a lot to the „awakening” of the consciences. Leaders enacted some reforms with an obvious positive impact on the social area. Through their measures they made those with the decision power to understand that no matter how humanitarian the principles of the laws regarding the improvement of the social conditions might be, not much can be done without a complete change of the mentality regarding the attitude towards man. Still, they did not always limited themselves to diagnose the social ethics of the time, but they had as a goal to realize a change in mentality. From their point of view many people suffered because of their fellows and that is why they thought that socially assisting those who are in need was in fact a duty of the conscience and not just an option. Experts in the human nature, the prophets considered that when the welfare was much more than what was necessary for a decent life it

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<sup>11</sup> Vezi și: Deuteronomio [See also: Deuteronomio], in *Grande Commentario Biblico, Parte I, Il Vecchio Testamento*, Queriniano- Brescia, 1974, p. 152.

brought about an extreme taste for luxury, extravagance and the creation of superfluous needs. Always militating for a simple life, the prophets considered that there is a divine pedagogy for all social inequalities as: *The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all* (Proverbs 22, 2). Its social goal is the materialization of the charitable acts of wealthy people. With other words we may say that the man has the opportunity to put into practice the command to love God from all his heart and his neighbour as himself (Leviticus 19, 18).

The advice to make justice to the poor and to the widows is to be found in most of the prophetic orations. It is also considered the first step in charity.

### **The Christian Motivation of the charitable act and the social assistance**

As it is well known, Christ the founder of Christianity began His mission in the world by announcing God's mercy for the people, as prophet Isaiah says: *The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners* (Isaiah 61, 1). There are many other biblical texts on which Christianity bases its charitable work. Still, one should remember that in the Christian belief poverty is not considered to be the worst thing in the world, although it is neither desired nor recommended, and opulence is not seen as the best one. It is true that from the perspective of some biblical books, the fate of the paupers is seen as a real divine curse (Job 24, 4-12; Psalms 109, 9 - 10). On the other hand, the history of Christianity records that many times, from purely religious belief, some people voluntarily assumed the poverty in order to be more available for religious and humanitarian missions.

No charity institution in the world will ever be able to make people equal exclusively through its actions, but it will, at least, render sensitive those who are willing to help their fellows by inoculating them the most noble feeling in the

world, that of unconditioned love. That is why, as I underlined, both Moses' law as well as the prophets, through the accurate settlements or through moralizing speeches had one main goal, which was not to create some social institutions, in the modern meaning of the word, but to prevent the pauperization of the country and the maintenance of a relative equality between people.<sup>12</sup>

I do consider that whoever helps his fellow is much more motivated to it if he has the premise that he has to follow the command of the Christian love, a disinterested and sacrificing love. What sacrificing love means is hard to be explained in any modern language as they lack the proper words that can express all the aspects of love. In order to see all the meanings of the word *love* we must resort to the Ancient Greek Language in which there are four terms with different significations and tints. From Greek the Christians took over the word *agape*, the most commonly used. We shall see why Christianity preferred this term and what is its connection to our subject.

One of the four terms that express love is *eros* which stands exclusively for the love between the sexes and is frequently met in the modern world but because it refers to the sexual love can not be used as charitable act. The Greek philosopher Aristotle underlined that the *eros* always begins with the delight of the eye as nobody ever falls in love without being at first enchanted by beauty.<sup>13</sup> Anyone can realize that who involves himself in the social assistance can not ever limit himself to helping only the beautiful persons, physically speaking. Because of its exclusively sensual tint, in the books of the New Testament the word is not being used in the charitable meaning.

Another word is *philia* with a much wider area of meanings than the first term. This means an engaged relation of body, mind and spirit. Still, this one may not express a long term relationship as it might be said that if the cause disappears, the effect also disappears. Although it might

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<sup>12</sup> Roland de Vaux, *op. cit.* p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotel, *Etica Nicomahică [The Nicomahic Ethics]*, 9, 4,3.

express the most intense love, in time it might fade and even disappear completely.<sup>14</sup>

The third word is *stergo*. It refers to that type of love which most times bases on family relationships as it expresses the relations between the family members: the love of the parents for their children or of the grandparents for their grandchildren and so like. It stands sometimes for the relations between the members of a little community who have mutual interests.

The word which has the most relevant meaning for the practice and in the same time for the justification of the social assistance and is *agape*. This term is almost lacking from the Greek literature but it was used even from the beginning of the Christian medium. It expresses the idea of permanent and disinterested love thus meaning a love always ready to sacrifice for the fellow men. This is the meaning with which it is used in John's Gospel who relates the dialogue between Jesus and Peter: *Simon, son of Jona, agapas me: do you love me?* As if he would not have understood the meaning, Peter answered: *Yes my Lord, you know I love you* (su. Oidas o, ti. Filw se) using the verb *filew* of which I said it means the love with some interest. Even at the third question of Jesus, also with *agapas me* Peter answered with *filew*. Practically He was satisfied with this if He saw that Peter was not ready yet to engage himself into a ministration that was based only on sacrificing love. As consequence, the first word *agapaw* is the most appropriate to express the love that God wanted from Peter. The idea is that the one who really wants to help his fellows is supposed to do it with all his soul and to prove a love full of sacrifices. Mother Teresa says: when we were in Calcutta there was a terrible lack of sugar. A Hindu little boy of only four year of age came to us together with his parents. He had with him a little jar with sugar. Giving it to me the little boy said: „for three days I renounce at my sugar. Give it to your kids”. That child loved his fellows with a great love depriving himself of something that was his, he loved with a

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<sup>14</sup> William Barclay, *Analiza semantică a unor termeni din Noul testament*, [The Semantic Analysis of some Terms from The New Testament], Wheaton-Illinois, U.S.A., 1992, p.69.

sacrificing love.<sup>15</sup> If the ancient Greek philosophers recommended only the love for the physically appealing people, Christian love is exactly the opposite, that is to be willing to love and redound to those who are not necessarily the most attractive. For a person that you love you can not have the same attitude you have for a thing. On the contrary, you engage yourself with your whole being so that many times even the features of the face, the voice or its nuances as well as the gestures become messengers of the love you have for the other person.<sup>16</sup> The Christian can not imagine that helping the miserable would mean only compassion or mercy. Of course, mercy has its value but sacrificing love means something more, means doing something for those people so that you will help them to get out of their state. Mother Teresa of Calcutta also tells us that when she was in Melbourne she went visiting a poor old man forgot by everyone. When he entered his home she noticed that it was extremely messy. And she says: *I tried to clean up but he stopped me saying: „leave it this way, it is good like this!”* I insisted and he finally let me. I also noticed that in the room there was a magnificent chandelier all dusted. „Why don't you light it up?” I asked. „What for, if I don't need it anymore?” And then I said: „If somebody would come to visit you would you light it up?” He said: „yes, if I could hear at least one human voice in his house I would light it up”. After some days I received from him a short message: „Tell my friend that the light she arouse in my life is still there!”.<sup>17</sup> This means that man can be taken out of his state not only by giving him money or other goods, but only a little sign of love.

Many times, as I was given to see some years ago in an asylum for old persons in Germany, people need really badly someone to gladly help them and to offer love and affection. It is true that the Christian love for the neighbour has many meanings, and it does not only signify the material help, even when necessary, but neither can it limit itself to a pure sentimental or declarative manifestation. It must extend to a permanent salvation<sup>18</sup> of man from poverty and material and

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<sup>15</sup> Madre Teresa di Calcutta, *La Gioia di darsi agli altri*, A cura di Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado, Edizioni Paoline, seconda edizione, Roma, 1980, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Belu D. I. *Despre iubire [About love]*, Timișoara, 1945, p. 40

<sup>17</sup> Madre Teresa, *op. cit.* p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Belu D. I. *op. cit.* p. 104.

spiritual misery. When working for his fellow, the Christian must have as a model Christ who did not just pity the hungry crowds as He said: *I have compassion on the crowd* (Matthew 15, 32) but also fed them.

One should not forget that charity is directly bonded to work, with the property and with the assistance of the miserable. The material help of the paupers, the ill or foreigners is a work that belongs to the Church itself which was conceived as a Divinity-Human institution in which man is supposed to mimic the divine compassion of the Creator who underlined that *He came not to be served but to serve* (Mark 10, 4-5; Matthew 20,28).

### **The Dignity of the Human Being, the Real Motivation for the Christian Social Assistance**

The value and the dignity of man's life is understood in the Judeo - Christian thinking as being the primary cause of any charitable act and we do believe that modern thinking it is consonant with it, at least from this point of view. In the Judaic thinking man's life is so precious that it is said that *to suppress even one life is to suppress the whole universe and to save one life is to save the whole universe*.<sup>19</sup> The wise Rabies advised that no one should offend no one because each man has qualities that the others do not and each man is considered to be unique. Before one was born no one was like him that is why he is irreplaceable.<sup>20</sup> From the Christian point of view, the charitable and social acts have as reference the unmistakable value of the human being. Considering the axiom according to which every person is unique and unrepeatable all the measures of the social assistance can not limit itself to helping man to gain his material wealth. At the same time they support him so that he will fulfil in all ranges: material, cultural, spiritual and social. That is why the real ground of the social

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<sup>19</sup> *Dicționar Enciclopedic de iudaism [Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaism]*, translated by C. Litman, "Hasefer" Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 128-129.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem.*

work it is found in, and it starts from the family itself. The child can not grow correctly if he is not being permanently assisted by those from the environment in which he was born. It is well known that most beings (animals, birds or reptiles) are superior to man from many points of view and even from their birth they are fully endowed with all they need to fulfil with their role on the earth. It is also known that some of the most extraordinary characteristics of few animals, day or night birds, reptiles or bugs constituted a real inspiration source for some high technologies, especially the military field. On the contrary the human cub comes in the world with the poorest endowments and thus he is the most helpless being, totally dependent on the love of his parents or his fellows. Man needs a lot of investments in order to be able to find his own way. A short description of man is made by Edgar Morin when he says: *"the man-child, naked as a worm, is the creature the most disinherited of the nature"*. *"He comes on earth with no psychological possibility* (this is proved, I would add, by the cases of some abandonee or lost children in the places where people do not live and who, growing up only in the company of animals did not prove a superior development) without any hereditary skill that would help in the self defend. Thus, he has to learn, not only what is specifically to man, meaning the social language and behaviour, but also what is natural for animals, things like walking, swimming, reproduction, procreation, birth, etc. Still, the same indefinite and innocent baby was able to become for millenniums, skilled hunter, fisher, peasant, prince, slave, barbarian, civilized, good, mean, wise, fool, killer, scholar, man-eater, sailor, miner, coward, hero, thief, politician, revolutionist, reactionary etc due to his natural capacity to be educated.<sup>21</sup>

The Christian considers that his life, as well as that of his neighbour, is a unique and exceptional gift which implies a lot of responsibility before God and society. A very short doctrine about the fellow man was expressed by prophet Micah (century 8 BC): *You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God* (chapter 6, 8).

Relating to his teacher, Saint John the Evangelist recommended us to help any man in need: *If someone who has*

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<sup>21</sup> Edgar Morin, *L'homme et la Mort*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1970, 97

*worldly goods sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth* (1 John 3, 17 – 18). A great father and writer of the Eastern Church, John Chrysostome named the act of helping the fellow man as well as compassion as being *the greatest professions of all without it everything fails and is wasted*.<sup>22</sup>

In one of the Christian writings from the first century, called *Barnaba's letter*, compassion for any human being is imagined as an excellent companion of the good man who travels on the way of light or of the eternal life, that is why we are advised: if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head (Romans 12, 20) that is why you shall not hold out your hand to take and draw it back when to give, and you shall never hesitate to give, and do not even mumble when you give, because you will encounter the good rewarder.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Towards Whom is the Charitable Act Directed?*

When we speak about charity, many times we take into consideration only one aspect of social assistance, and that is the material aid. It is already known the fact that in some regions of the Earth now more than ever in man's history, the industrial development and the modern technologies contributed to the augmentation of the economy and also of the material wealth. At the same time in other regions the inhabitants are undergoing terrible famine, misery and are illiterate. Those who point out what the advantages of the civilization might be are numerous enough but these have to be accessible to all the inhabitants of the planet. Sadly, they do

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<sup>22</sup> Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omilii la Matei (scrieri partea a treia)*, [St. John Chrysostome, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew –writings,part3*], traducere, introducere, indici și note de Pr. D. Fecioru [translation, introduction, indices and footnotes by Pr. D. Fecioru], IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1984, p. 587.

<sup>23</sup> Vezi: Epistola lui Barnaba, în *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, traducere, note și indici de Pr. D. Fecioru [see: Barnabas Epistle, in *The Writings of Apostolic Fathers*, translation, footnotes and indices by Pr. D. Fecioru], IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973, p. 136.

not offer the most appropriate solutions for this to be done.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the major problem that rises is to know how to help the numerous miserable people whose number is getting bigger every year. It is understood that every country should help firstly its own citizens. Unfortunately some even indulge themselves in a certain condition and they get used to being helped. Before Christianity, and after that in the Christian centuries, begging had not become yet an extremely profitable job. Here and there a real industry of begging may exist and many of those who want to be seen as poor men, have in fact important bank accounts. I personally know cases of persons who simulate to be pauper but they beg in the countries of Europe where they gain money that others gain by honest work. Many times I have been intrigued how easily they can full some persons. When they speak about the paupers, the Gospels clearly state that these weren't false handicapped, lazy nor alcohol or drug addicts but they were blind, crippled or lepers having thus the right to beg. I do believe that those who are in charge to help the paupers should also take care of their education about the charitable act and work. No one should believe that he has unlimited and permanent right to be helped without making any effort. No one is supposed to work for the already alcohol addicted or drug consumer who ask for money so they can feed their vice. About this kind of people it is clearly stated in the New Testament: *if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat* (II Thessalonians 3, 10). With other words, this idea is to be found at some Christian thinkers or writers. Antoine de Saint Exupery wrote: *To many times I saw the compassion wasted... we must learn to look into their hearts and care only for those who are worthy of it. It has been a time when in my sadness I took pity on beggars and their wounds... until I understood that they cared about their stink as about a rare luxury... I surprised them scraping and proudly showing one another the rottenness and bargaining with the gotten offers.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Concile Oecumenique Vatican II, *Constitutions, Decrets, Declarations, Messages*, Editions du Centurion, Paris, 1967, p. 213-219.

<sup>25</sup> Antoine de Saint Exupery, *Citadela [The Citadel]*, Junimea Publishing House, Iași, 1977, p. 5.

It is interesting that the Mosaic legislation as well as the prophets do not mention those who do not want to work, as they did not even exist, which I think it is impossible. Another very interesting statement is that of the wise Maimonide who influenced by the Holy Text said that the highest level of charity is to help man to get to a point from which he can find his own way, helping him to do something from which he would earn his living.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the fellow must be helped to learn to do something, and obviously he should be given the possibility to work so that he could find his own way otherwise he will become an aid addicted, as the alcohol or drug addicted and he will forget that he must get to a point in which he can earn his living and be able to help others too.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Dicționar Enciclopedic de Iudasim [Cf. Encyclopedic Dictionary of Judaism]*, p. 521

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