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The role of religion in the system of social and medical services in post-communism Romania

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the phenomenon of social services in post-1989 Romania, underscoring the role of the religious factor in the establishment and operation of nongovernmental organisations active in the area of family and child protection/child welfare. The results are based on empirical data collected from interviews with representatives of NGO-s in Iaşi that correspond to the profile of faith-based organisations and which have been included in the list of accredited providers of social services. We used an assessment grid that allowed us to highlight a number of specific characteristics to the Romanian space, found among faith-based organisations involved in the development of social and medical services. One direction that Romanian organisation took was to dilute in time the religious message and to secularise their practices under the influence of the Orthodox majority, as well as following the requirements imposed by secular donors and especially by public ones. The channelling of private resources donated to religious cults predominantly towards building and restoring establishments (churches, monasteries) rather than towards the development of social faith-based programmes aimed at vulnerable populations has caused in faith-based organisations a high level of dependency on secular donors. The process in which the practices and the discourse are secularised is accompanied by a trend towards the fragmentation of the Christian-based civil society.

Key Words: faith-based organisations, religion, social and medical services, secularisation, NGO-s.

Foreword

In post-1989 Romania, the system of social services, starting from those focussing on the welfare of children, developed greatly due to neo-Protestant faith-based organisations that intensely financed social services and new social practices, creating best practices models and contributing their expertise in these services' development. The focus on child protection/child welfare was generated partly by the international media campaigns that showed the disastrous situation of institutionalised children[1], and partly by the opportunity to attract donations and funds for changing the lives of these children. In the early days of the establishment of social services aimed at children, especially at institutionalised ones, the messages were mainly humanitarian and charitable (food aid, medicine, clothing and equipment), and gradually became increasingly professional and implicitly secular.

The domain of child protection is not only a domain of profoundly positive experiences in diversifying social services, but also an area for experiencing public-private partnership and the new management style, based on intervention projects. By their very definition, nongovernmental organisations are an alternative (and not a destructive one) to state-run institutions; they are the community expression of individuals associating in order to achieve collective objectives. It is certitude the fact that the state itself, through the institutions it has developed, pursues collective objectives, but the social practices have a certain institutional form, starting from the general interest shown by the preservation and continuation of the social system; the state is itself an image of preservation, of a conservation of social structure and order. Nongovernmental organisations are the result of individual initiatives (foundations) or of group initiatives (associations) aiming to bring about change; they appear as alternatives to the institutional organisation and functioning of the social system; no-one challenges the importance of the role the state plays, but we need to recognize the merit of the involvement the nongovernmental organisations have in solving some social problems and in promoting innovative ideas that develop social services adapted to local needs. Some professionals in social work see nongovernmental organisations as engines of change; change is seen as a modification of the social system, and nongovernmental organisations participate in changing the social both at structural and at functional level, and the most important influence on the social system coming from the nongovernmental organisations is apparent at the functional level, that is in the social practices. In the domain of child protection as well, maybe more obviously than in other domains, faith-based organisations have participated in the introduction of new social practices, of work standards, by implementing pilot projects that have subsequently been replicated by

the governmental system. Moreover, even the county authorities for social welfare and child protection began their existence with structures similar to those of nongovernmental organisations, and now they are institutional structures of the local public authority. At the same time, nongovernmental organisations, especially trans-national ones, have been a factor of influence on public policies, in step with the globalisation process, avoiding the direct involvement of developed states in the promotion of social services models in Romania[2]. The theoretical model of analysis starts from the definition of the faith-based organisation proposed by Sider and Unruh[3].

Analysis frameworks for faith-based organisations

Starting from the assumption that in Romania social services were developed with the support of international faith-based organisations, we aim to identify characteristic features of Romanian organisations involved in this process, as well as to examine the dynamics of their evolution, underlining the manner in which the religious factor influenced their progress. In our endeavour we have used the analysis model developed in a number of studies by Sider and Unruh[4] in terms of establishing a typology of faith-based organisations according how intense is the presence of the religious element in their social actions. The authors place faith-based social action in a continuum, starting from strictly religious organisations (churches, cults), and up to secular associative structures, foundations and nongovernmental organisations that endorse a certain religious ideology. Social initiatives and actions in the social space that have an identifiable religious ideology at their origin are known as faith-based organisations.

In the following we attempt to present the dimensions that are essential for describing the characteristics of faith-based organisations[5], giving as examples the elements we have identified in the Romanian NGO sector:

the mission statement of the organisation or any other documents that present its purpose; the religious content of the mission is sometimes expressed explicitly: one organisation aims to be "an arm that supports the weak and a voice given to those who cannot speak. It shall act towards "restoring and preserving the solidarity and compassion spirit in communities, thus fulfilling the will of our Lord"[6]; other times, this content is implicit, with references to universal spiritual values, as is the case of the *Star of Hope* foundation in Iaşi, an organisation "based on Christian principles and values", its mission being "to help children in need to have a better life, to grow and develop in a climate full of dignity and trust, which values the human being".[7]

the founders: many social and medical services were founded by religious entities. Some of them have preserved the religious ingredient as

an identity element and as a distinguishing element "in relation to similar secular programmes: one example is the *Providenţa* Medical Centre, established at the initiative of HH Daniel, the Metropolitan Bishop", considered a "part of the social and charity work carried out by the Church"[8]; this organisation underlines the particularity of its medical services offer – the spiritual approach to healing: "In support of the argument for the superior quality of the medical services on offer here are both the modern medical equipment and the organisation of the building according to current Western standards, as well as the integrated, «body and soul» approach to the medical act o healing human beings, with the purpose of rediscovering and affirming its dignity. Therefore, at the *Providenţa* Medical Centre, as well as in the other medical facilities established within the Metropolitanate, the patients are treated as individuals rather than as ailing bodies"[9]. A large proportion of social services in the Romanian NGO sector, although established by Christian religious entities, have secularised their programmes in time, in order to be able to access more easily the financial support provided by secular donors.

affiliation to religious entities; this refers to a close relationship with another religious organisational entity, not necessarily the founder, which provides legal funding, management services and/or key resources, and which may affect the religious character of the organisation's actions. There exist social, medial and social-medical programmes affiliated to religious entities, such as the *Solidaritate şi Speranţă* foundation or *Caritas*, that provide integrated medico-social services in dealing with issues such as alcohol or drug addiction. These organisations approach substance dependence as a complex, psycho-socio-medical and cultural problem[10].

composition of the board of directors: it may be exclusively religious, mixed (religious and secular) or exclusively secular. In addition, the recruitment and appointment of the board is sometimes carried out directly by a religious entity. For example, the members of the *Caritas* foundation board of directors are selected by the Diocese and it includes both priests and secular individuals.

selection of management team: whether or not religious commitment, the endorsement of a certain set of beliefs, belonging to a certain congregation or having a lifestyle that is in keeping with certain values are a requirement for the appointment on the superior staff.

selection of personnel working for the organisation: concerns the extent to which the personnel recruitment process takes into consideration religious confession and the attachment to a number of religious values.

funding and the origin of the organisation's financial and non-financial resources (buildings, time, volunteers, food and equipment donations etc).

religious practices organised for the personnel as part of the social and medical programmes – the extent to which religious practices structure the organisation's routines.

the location of programmes, the presence on display of religious symbols, objects and quotes etc.

the programmes' religious content: Jeavons[11] calls religious activities "spiritual technologies in the context of spiritual social services". Examples of spiritual technologies: prayer, worshipping religious objects, prayer, worship, study of sacred texts, religious teachings and testimonies, and invitations to religious activities or faith commitments. Spiritual technologies may be an important ingredient of social and medical programmes.

integration of religious components with the rest of the programme's components; this characteristic examines how service beneficiaries are likely to encounter religion in the context of the program.

connections between the religious content and the desired outcome of the programme – this refers to the subordination of religious aims to the social aims of the programme, changing the client's spiritual condition being a requirement within the fulfilment of the social objective.

Sider and Unruh[12] propose the following typology in order to portray the diversity of faith-based organisations:

a) *faith-permeated organisations*: the relation between the organisation's programmes and the religious element is expressed explicitly by the mission statement, by the staff selection strategy, by the board's religious affiliation and by the programme funding, most often in confessional and ethnic communities[13]; the programmes' religious content is considered a mandatory ingredient for their success[14], and the staff and clients' participation in religious activities is often required as part of holistically treating the human being as a unity between body and soul[15].

b) *faith-centred organisations*: these are tied to religious communities by affiliation and by funding sources, and the social programmes transmit an explicitly religious message; however, the clients' participation in religious activities is optional; religious confession and attachment to the organisation's religious values are valid criteria when selecting personnel.

c) *faith-affiliated organisations*: preserve in their mission statement certain spiritual elements, often implicit and viewed as conditioning the programmes' effectiveness; the confessional founder maintains influence on the organisation, especially through the mission statement and the implicit spiritual content of programmes and sometimes through the stated religious attachment of certain members of the board and of the executive management. In many cases, the initial religious reference turns into an ethical one, with references to ethical attitudes towards disabled individuals and towards vulnerable groups in general[16].

d) *faith-background organisations*: organisations that have religious elements in their history, acting. however, in a secular manner in their programmes. The board, staff and clients' religious affiliation is not a criterion of eligibility.

e) *faith-secular partnerships*: a partnership relation between a secular entity and one or several religious entities; programme management is typically secular, while religious partners contribute volunteers and material resources; a strategy of blending the religious discourse with the secular one results in the initiation of new programmes animated by the ideas of social responsibility, of solidarity, wrapped in new concepts and practices, such as those specific to social economy[17].

f) *secular organisations*: no religious reference in their mission statement or in their history; they distance themselves from any type of religious commitment.

Transnational organisations and the development of social services in Romania

In terms of social services, religious congregations are a subsystem of organisations aiming to play a significant role in the social protection system[18]. Transnational religious organisations have laid the foundations for the development of social services in Romania after the fall of communism, as well as setting in motion the development of the civil society. Before being taken over by the state, social services depended to a great extent on funds received from international organisations based outside Romania, including from Christian organisations, especially in the interval known as "la vague humanitaire"[19]. The development of innovative social services focussed on importing intervention models that had been tested internationally, promoted by transnational organisations, many of these being originally Christian ones. The first stage, that of *initiation* of social services, is the stage where some international faith-based organisations, usually with worldwide experience, offered their support for running *pilot projects* or of demonstrative projects in the domain of child protection (such as projects concerning the implementation of a model of temporary family care, day care centres for children with disabilities, maternal centres, family-type homes, home care for disabled children etc.). All these types of services, without exception, had been originally developed by nongovernmental structures, mainly with the support of funds from abroad; when these projects proved effective, they were replicated by the public institutions, but also at an experimental level, addressing a small number of clients. Secular transnational organisations appeared later on, at a time when the NGO sector became professionalized ONG[20], and focussed on technical assistance, advocacy campaigns and on replicating the experience acquired by the originally Christian organisations[21], which provided direct services, on the process of developing standards and research in the field of social services[22].

In Romanian as well, the organisations created by, or affiliated to traditional congregations (Orthodox and Catholic) show a tendency

towards professionalizing their social activities in order to reduce inequality in terms of access and quality of services[23]. This trend towards providing professional social services that go beyond covering the clients' basic needs (soup kitchen, temporary shelter, material assistance) is supported by the trend in Romanian theological education towards developing its own social assistance programmes. The fact that various organisations of religious origin tend to take on public-interest social programmes requiring access to public funding sources forces them to provide specialised services at nationwide quality standards, to professionalize their staff or to recruit qualified personnel. To faith-permeated organisations and to faith-centred organisations, this situation may pose difficulties related to maintaining the degree of religiousness of the organisation and implicitly that of programmes. These organisations must either hire secular qualified personnel or train their own human resources and equipping them with a double background: theological as well social work. Choosing the second option seems to be better accepted by religious entities, since it guarantees a better control over the mission and the religious content of programmes, giving them the opportunity to remain faith-permeated organisations or faith-centred organisations. In order to resist staff secularisation in such organisations, theological universities set up social theology departments as counterparts for the social work/social assistance departments in secular universities. In time it emerged that social theology graduates were not recognised as social workers and therefore could not work for the secular social services. In order to meet this social demand, some of the theological universities have decided to revert to the organisation of social work/social departments.

Chaves & Tsitos consider that most American funding for anti-poverty programmes does not go directly to congregations but rather to faith-based organisations providing social services[24]. Similarly, many Romanian parishes establish their own nongovernmental organisations, which may be considered faith-centred organisations, in order to be able to access national, local and European public funds. However, there are examples of parishes in the county of Iaşi, such as the *Sfântul Voievod Ştefan cel Mare* parish, which involve themselves directly in social programmes, obtaining funds for them, as part of partnerships with public institutions, such as the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection. This parish, for instance, runs a day centre for senior citizens, set up as part of an European project by the parish itself rather that by an affiliated organisation.

From our point of view, the growth in the number of faith-centred nongovernmental organisations that are connected to parishes is a good strategy for attracting funds for their clients; in time, however, this leads to *the secularisation of these organisations*, due to the contents of the programmes they implement, which is established in agreement with the

priorities of secular donors and according to the nationwide quality standards, as required by Romanian legislation. By comparison, *faith-permeated organisations* still maintain their orientation towards primary services (meeting the client's basic needs), which are not regulated by any nationwide quality standards: day centres for senior citizens, children's clubs, home care, counselling for alcohol addicts etc. The secularisation process will start, most probably, once these services are standardised and the requirements for accreditation, assessment, training, activity monitoring etc. are legislated; this process will force faith-permeated or faith-centred organisations to become religiously-affiliated organisations or organisations that have their origin in a religious doctrine, in which the religious factor is less clearly present. In order to slow down the secularisation process, some faith-based and faith-centred organisations make a distinction between the spiritual identity of the organisations and the content of their own programmes in a contextual mediation of the discourse, between the religious and the non-religious[25]. Thus it is possible for a faith-centred organisation to carry out programmes that are secular in nature, the same way it is possible for an organisation that does not represent itself as being faith-based, such as a hospital or a medical or social centre[26] etc. to provide services and programmes with a significant religious content (such as the presence of a church on the premises of a hospital, of canonical services within the hospital, confession, communion, last rites etc. for the hospital patients).

The transition from religious mission to secular mission in transnational organisations

Many of the Christian-origin transnational organisations that started working in Romania after 1989 as branches of a mother organisation have adapted their mission statements, so that religious references became less clearly outlined. In time, the organisations' mission statements lost their religious content to the extent to which some of them became altogether secular, especially after the establishment of Romanian organisations, which took the programmes over from those particular international organisations. In order to acquire membership and to be able to develop innovative social services, transnational organisations have reshaped their mission statements, proposing ecumenical visions and taking on board clerics belonging to other cults than those of the original organisations, working in partnership with the Orthodox Church (for instance, *World Vision*); this strategy was justified by the particular situation of Romania's population religious profile (predominantly Orthodox) and by the people's reluctance in relation to other cults, less represented in the country in terms of number or visibility. Jeffrey Stout [27] considers that in the process of ecumenisation of social services it is less important for faith-based organisations to identify a common religious core, a common spiritual and

religious nucleus, and more important to find a consensus on procedures and civility norms. All great religions have a set of golden rules concerning cohabitation, and all of them give special attention to friendship, love and compassion, essential for social order[28]. Research[29] shows that religious pluralism and encouraging the individual option of voluntary affiliation is a premise for the development of civility in a pluralist society. In the countries with a solid democracy, such as the USA, it is precisely religious and cultural pluralism that resulted in the emergence of behaviours for the acceptance of differences[30], which is a premise for the development of democratic values, as ethnic and spiritual identities are volatilized and the permeability for other ideologies increases. In post-communist Romania, almost exclusively Orthodox, we cannot speak about religious pluralism on the scale of that described in the situation concerning the USA; therefore, the significant faith-based, protestant organisations that arrived in Romania after 1989, have chosen to either become ecumenical, preserving their religious component, or to gradually give up this component. At this stage, the models that had proven their viability and effectiveness within experimental projects were *taken over* by central authorities, becoming their responsibility (the models were taken over and financed from the state budget). This is the stage when a national structure was developed, by establishing governmental institutions with responsibilities and tasks specific to the social protection of children and family (such as the establishment of specialised public services at county level). Many of the services developed initially were taken over at methodological and financial level by these governmental structures; thus, a series of national-interest programmes were developed with the financial support of the government. This is a stage where public-private and, where necessary, secular-religious partnerships are formed, with consequences on the professionalisation and secularisation of practices. This is the stage where, based on effective experiences and on good practices models, minimum working standards were established for the various types of social services. This is the moment when a common work methodology was established for both the governmental institutions and the nongovernmental ones. The development of these standards is a result of the process of maturation and secularization of social practices in the domain of social work, an argument for the recognition of the positive experiences in the domain and a new awareness of the need for structuring the domain; these standards appeared as a result of a consultation process with the nongovernmental organisations with experience in their particular domains, and they are still an important landmark in the social protection developed by the providers, be they public or private.

The General Directorates for Social Work and Child Protection were established, thus creating at county level a structure that took over the issues of adult disabled individuals, as well as those of third-age people. In

the beginning, the name for this county-level institution did not include the phrase "child protection", fact that generated heated discussions and an opposition from the staff employed by the former structure, which had as its sole objective the protection of children. In order to keep on the public agenda the interest for the domain of social work for children, the name including the phrase "child protection" was accepted; with this structure in place, in the circumstances of financial constraints at county level, part of the staff involved in child protection was transferred to the departments dealing with the social protection of adults, a fact that also lead to a transfer of competencies towards this domain. We can note that the process of restructuring the system of social work for adults follows the route taken by the reorganisation of child protection, with landmarks such as: closing down residential institutions for disabled adults, developing family-type units, encouraging the reintegration of disabled individuals in the family, organising home care services for disabled adults and for third-age persons etc. More and more social services adapted to local needs appeared; this is the stage when the offer burgeoned for services developed, in most of the cases, by nongovernmental organisations, organisational structures with more flexibility and adaptability. The public system borrowed the models experimented by private providers and developed new ones, depending on the conditions imposed by reality of these institutions (lack of financial resources, management style, staff structure etc.)[31]. The professionalisation of social services aimed at children have determined faith-based organisations to secularise their messages and practices in this domain as well as turn towards other categories of vulnerable population; these organisations have reactivated the Christian-humanitarian messages and the charity services aimed at adult disabled individuals and at seniors, helping bring their issues to the public agenda. In reaction, public authorities developed the services aimed at these vulnerable and disadvantaged categories, while faith-based organisations diluted again their religious message, professionalizing their own services.

Development of local secular organisations

The emergence of local organisations during a later stage in the development of civil society[32] has been influence by the existence of potential donors (Phare, FRDS, the EU, structural funds etc.), by their requirements and by the general level of development in society, as well as by the new legislation concerning the funding of nongovernmental organisations by individual and legal entities. The local secular organisations developed in parallel with the faith-based ones, taking advantage of the latter's secularised experience. The development of the Romanian civil society stepped into another stage, generated by association and affinities. Whereas the first organisations in post-

communist Romania had an explicit religious background and were established at the initiative of international foundations, the first secular organisations emerged mainly as an associative initiative (professional associations, parents' associations, associations of people affected by a certain social or medical problem). Christian-based transnational organisations placed a greater accent on social services, even when their clients required medical care as well. The development of medical services by nongovernmental organisations was initiated mainly at the stage when local faith-based or other type of organisations were established. This is the stage when professional associative organisations also developed, focussing not so much on direct services as on establishing standards and monitoring the degree to which they are observed.

This process also has had several directions:

The transformation of branches of faith-based transnational organisations into local secular organisations, due to the withdrawal of financial support by the mother organisations and encouraged by the emergence of new opportunities for funding from European direction (pre-accession funds, structural funds etc.). The fact that secularise organisations changed their message sometimes had a strong impact on the organisation's operation, sometimes to the point of dissolution. The initial message of faith-based transnational organisations operated using two different types of rhetoric: in their countries of origin (i.e. outside Romania) as a source of increased awareness in order to attract funds, and in Romania as a rhetoric for establishing the groundwork of the provided services. These organisations have not reached a level of development that would allow them to attract funding locally using a rhetoric of solidarity based on a religious message. In the circumstances where the availability of funds for service provision is never certain, the organisations have looked for other ways to raise funds (payment for services, training sessions, becoming the designated recipients of 2% of the income tax). The local religious-origin organisations also used these solutions for raising funds, excluding the religious overtones from their fundraising messages.

The emergence of local organisations whose mission statement was devoid of religious content; these organisations: a) deal with problems that are specific to a certain population group requiring specialised intervention (associations of chronically-ill patients, associations of parents of children suffering from various chronic illnesses, associations of special-needs people, the unemployed, vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, included those who are in this position due to their ethnicity, women's associations etc.); b) emerged at the initiative of individuals with expertise in various specific fields, providing technical support, training and retraining programmes, consulting services for local organisations. Local organisations that provide mainly direct services rely on

partnerships with parishes in order to have easier access to the community and to distribute resources.

The development of corporate-origin nongovernmental organisations generated by the *philosophy of corporate social responsibility* and encouraged by the tax deductions granted to the businesses that support the programmes run by such organisations. As a rule, these secular organisations have activities that are completely independent of any religious initiative. Corporations tend to impose their own vision on social solidarity and to support various programmes through the organisations they themselves set up. The rhetoric of such organisations replaces the Christian solidarity message with an individual- and environment-centred corporate responsibility message, included in the corporation's marketing strategy. Whereas in the case of the Christian rhetoric of faith-based organisations we are dealing with a call to mobilisation for helping one's peers, in the corporate rhetoric the message presents chiefly the corporation's actions aimed at improving the living standards of individuals and communities. The message of responsibility has been taken over by the state as well, in the shape of the rhetoric concerning individual responsibility, shifting the accent from the state's incapacity of managing a welfare system to the individual citizen's potential to manage his or her own situation.

Development of local faith-based organisations

The emergence of local faith-based organisations is another stage in the development of nongovernmental organisations providing services in the social domain. The most significant process is the emergence of *faith-centred organisations* around parishes and monasteries. Among the favourable conditions at play: a) the opportunity to obtain funding, as churches and monasteries are not eligible for funding in the domain of social services; therefore they established legal entities with a socio-religious mission, dependent on the parish or monastery; b) the promotion, by the Orthodox Church clerical hierarchies, of the Church's social mission; c) the emergence of laws granting tax relief to organisations and the existence of sponsors from the private sector interested to invest in the social programmes organised around parishes and monasteries; d) the preservation, by the Church as an institution, of its capital of population trust; e) the increase in the clergy's interest in social action, especially in charity, which attract the churchgoers towards religious activities and make the Church more visible in the community; f) the reliance on the charity ethos and on the traditions of Christian missionarism, Romanians being situated between conservative traditions and modern institutions. Beyond the atomisation of social initiatives run under the umbrella of organisations affiliated with parishes and monasteries, there is a trend towards a certain aggregation of this type of

initiatives within faith-centred organisations affiliated to the hierarchical structures of the Orthodox Church (Metropolitanates, bishoprics, the Patriarchy). This trend may be related to the risks of secularisation of the programmes and even of the organisations discourse[33], as well as to the decrease in Church control over these organisations.

Particularities of Romanian faith-based organisations

Although Sider and Unruh[34] make a distinction between *faith-permeated organisations* and *faith-centred organisations*, with the exception of a few particular cases such as social services run by congregations or monasteries, the data we have collected do not significantly support this distinction in the Romanian NGO sector. In the past twenty years, the initiatives that some organisations had to promote a certain faith-permeated model (the staff was forced to convert to the organisation's religious cult, to take part in religious practices, and these requirements extended to the clients as well – some services were conditioned by the clients' participation in the religious practices specific to that particular confession etc.) did not have the expected success, and many of them disappeared from the ranks of accredited and recognised service providers. This phenomenon was more common in the case of specialised services (for example, residential centres for seniors or for children) and became more significant the moment the minimum mandatory standards were introduced for such services, stipulating a more rigorous control from the part of the local authorities[35]. Moreover, faith-centred organisations, as defined by the criteria established by Sider and Unruh[36], do not seem to exist in Romania. Even originally confessional organisations, such as Catholic and Orthodox ones, cannot be classified as belonging to the faith-centred category. This could be the result of the lack of a religious and confessional pluralism such as the one that exists in the USA, which would lead to a strengthening of ties between churchgoers and organisations, the former being the main source for funding the services. In Romania, public funds are the main source of funding in these faith-based organisations, rather than the private funds of confessional communities, which results in a lack of mutual conditioning between churchgoers and organisations. The Romanian private donors who donate to faith-affiliated organisations prefer that the money they give is used primarily for the construction of religious buildings rather than for the church's social programmes. This determines faith-based organisations to apply for public funding in running social programmes; this dependence on public funding and their chief orientation towards these funds forces them to undergo an inevitable process of professionalisation, standardisation and implicitly secularisation.

Conclusions

After the fall of communism, the development of Romania's civil society was influenced by the activities of faith-based organisations, especially of transnational ones, providing services in the social domain. Beyond the noticeable effect on the development of social and medical services, international organisations have proposed new philosophies in approaching social issues and intervention models generated by these ideologies. Over the years, most organisations that arrived in Romania as branches of international ones have become Romanian organisations (registered as legal entities and having exclusively Romanian personnel), losing part of the manifestation of their religious background. Many faith-based organisations that did not undergo the secularisation process have disappeared from the area of social services and have returned to the area of charity.

In the Romanian landscape, precisely due to the particularity of the religious composition of the population and to the specificity of the access to resources, it can be noticed that faith-permeated and faith-centred organisations are virtually not represented at all in the area of social services. Even the organisations established by the traditional Churches or directly by parishes have the status of faith-affiliated organisations, but their programmes are secularised.

As a reaction to the secularisation of the social services provided by originally Christian organisations, a new rhetoric emerges, supporting their Christian will and mission to manage social services. Ata closer look, according to the assessment grid detailed above, it can be noticed that there are major discrepancies between Christian rhetoric and the secular practices in the area of social services.

The process of secularisation of faith-based organisations takes place even among local organisations that had a religious origin, mainly because they must comply with the standards and norms established for various categories of services, apply for public funding or for European Community support. Charity, which is the main characteristic of the services provided by religious organisations, is being gradually replaced by professionalism, standards and demands that satisfy the requirements of a certain style of social management – focussed on efficiency, effectiveness and quantifiable results. Being dependent mainly on public funding, faith-based organisations try to explore the opportunities created by the laws that stipulate tax reliefs (sponsorship, donations, redirecting 2% of income tax towards a designated NGO) and to use to their advantage the charity ethos in developing charity actions. Most of the time, individual donations and contributions are used for primary services provided for various categories of vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals. Dependence on public funding for ensuring the provision of professional social and medical services causes faith-based organisations

to become increasingly estranged from their religious mission, both in discourse and in action.

The professionalisation of faith-based organisations is one of the requirements for the accreditation of the services they provide; the personnel must be highly trained, it must use instruments, techniques and procedures that exclude religious messages, and certain standards must be upheld in the interventions on target groups; the fact that faith-based organisations provide specialised socio-medical services result in a secularisation of their discourse and practices. Wishing to preserve their religious message, faith-based organisations aimed for a professionalisation that would place theological training first. However, after the first graduates of social theology had difficulty finding jobs even in faith-based organisations, due to the secular criteria for the official recognition of the social work profession. As a consequence, some theological universities have decided to establish preponderantly secular departments of social work/social assistance.

The establishment of faith-based organisations affiliated with parishes and providing specialised services does not represent, according to the assessment grid above, a means of increasing or influencing the degree of religiousness in the community, but quite the opposite, a fragmentation of the Church's influence and a secularisation of its perception by the members of the community. Thus, the parishes' initiative to grow the number of such organisations contributes to the dissipation and dilution of the religious message when the established organisations provide services that go beyond simple charity.

Notes

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