

THE PRINCIPLES OF FRATERNITY IN EASTERN CHRISTIANITY AS A BACKGROUND FOR MODERN CARITATIVE SOCIAL COHESION

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Abstract

History of professional Caritative Social work content reaches back to the beginning of Christian era. The content and basis of Caritative social work reveals the understanding of social dimension and general conceiving of human beings from the Christian perspective. Solidarity and cooperation, caritative attitude, the value of personality, fraternity made Christianity as principally a social religion. The mediating concepts such as subsidiarity, liberty, solidarity, fraternity and equality can be viewed of unity of human kind in Christ. Article deals with Christian heritage of Europe contributing to commonly shared worldview and reveals the role of Caritative social ministry as ethos of Eastern Orthodox Christianity against the Western subjective individualism. The spirit of egalitarianism is deeply embedded in the body and soul of Eastern Christianity. There is no place for race / social discrimination in Eastern Christianity despite of its highly hierarchical structure. Christians still should stay with their civil tasks and obligations through Caritative Social work since their vision of “the self” is social.

KEY WORDS: Caritative Social work, fraternity, social cohesion, Eastern Christianity.

Anotacija

Profesionalaus karitatyvinio socialinio darbo istorija siekia krikščioniškosios eros pradžią. Šio darbo turinys ir principai atskleidžia socialinio matmens supratimą ir giluminį žmogaus suvokimą iš krikščioniškos perspektyvos. Solidarumas, bendradarbiavimas, karitatyvinis požiūris, asmenybės, kaip vertybės, supratimas, broliškumas leidžia krikščionybę vertinti kaip iš esmės socialinę religiją. Tarpininkavimo koncepcijos, tokios kaip subsidiarumas, laisvė, solidarumas, broliškumas ir lygybė, gali būti vertinamos kaip žmogaus vienybė Kristuje. Straipsnyje analizuojamas Europos krikščioniškasis paveldas, kuriuo grindžiamas dominuojantis pasaulinis požiūris į karitatyvinę veiklą, priešpriešinant Rytų stačiatikių krikščionybės etosą prieš Vakarų subjektyvų individualizmą. Egalitarizmo dvasia giliai įsišaknijusi Rytų krikščionybės kūne ir sieloje. Nepaisant hierarchinės struktūros, Rytų krikščionybėje neegzistuoja rasinė ar socialinė diskriminacija. Karitatyvinio darbo kontekste krikščionys išlaiko socialinę viziją ir nuosekliai įgyvendina savo pilietines užduotis bei įsipareigojimus.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: rūpestingas socialinis darbas, broliškumas, socialinė sanglauda, Rytų krikščionybė.

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Introduction

As one studies broad currents of European philosophical thought on the definition of what is human, a curious conclusion stands out. The social dimension, the very fact of life in common, is no generally conceived of as being necessary to

human beings. It is a supposition that remains unformulated and forms the common denominator for theories that, in other respects, are at war with each other. Whatever position one takes in these arguments, a definition of man as solitary and nonsocial is accepted (Todorov, 2001, p. 2).

On the other hand, the self exists only in and by its relations with others; intensifying the social exchange means intensifying the self. The aim of existence could not be one or the other – no more self or no more society – but “in hours of miracle”, in the language of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, “the quality of human relationships” (2002, p. 97). To become conscious that the aim of human desire is not pleasure but relations between men can permit us both to be reconciled to situations that would seem unsatisfactory by other criteria and to act in a way that would make life in European society better in a lasting and general fashion.

Solidarity and cooperation, Caritative attitude is morally preferable to its opposite and, on the other hand, the autonomy of everyone is a value. These ideas are worth to remember in the time of deep economic crisis in EU when the figure of 118,7 million people who live at risk of exclusion and poverty within the European Union remains constant and prompt us (*see* People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2018; The Social Dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy, 2011). Against all expectations, social inequality is growing and man’s solitude and sufferings from being insignificant person, lost in the crowd, is the facet of human existence of many people in Europe in both pan-European context and on the level of the individual member States.

Many causes were identified for this process, and they are often interlinked in quite complex ways. One of the key causes identified is general lack of employment opportunities, aggravated by the financial crisis and recession. Social rights and entitlements of employees are coming under increasing pressure – while “equal pay for equal work” is no longer an unquestioned principle. Success of *Europe 2020 Strategy* depends on actions in all its priority areas supporting each other. This should enable the EU and its member States to deliver higher levels of employment and social cohesion.

We are facing new circumstances in Europe for development of associative democracy, social integration of society on a new level (*see* Reflection paper on the future of EU finances, 2017; White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025). Are we? On what grounds? The concept of social reciprocity, fraternity and social cohesion become increasingly important and it can be expressed in terms of redefined the conception of *common European identity*. A common social dimension becomes the central in understanding of the European identity.

1. The Social Discourse of Europe and Eastern Christianity

The European identity is a notion which is rooted in the social discourse of Europe, having its roots in phenomena of the Eastern Christianity.¹

If we wish however to describe the position of common social life principles in Europe, it is not enough simply to record the objective indicators of loss equality. If we truly wish to take measure of the presence of social identity of Europe, we must dig deeper and consider social and ethical, symbolic structures that make up the framework for collective life in societies concerned.

The European past contains complex paradigms which could be presented as common and shared European background. Ideas of dignity of human being the primordially of reason and the rule of law, personal values, liberal democracy and solidarity, fraternity made Christianity as principally a *social religion*. The mediating concepts, such as subsidiarity, governing concepts like liberty, solidarity, fraternity and equality can be viewed as *unity of humankind in Christ*. One of the key characteristics of the Church is its traditionalism. The term is easily misunderstood although the tradition means continuity rather than stagnation. The ethos of the Church is the same since its first centuries. And one may wonder – aren't life situations and essential choices of a Christian the same regardless of historical transformations?

Even before Christianity was proclaimed as an official religion in Roman Empire (end of 4th century), it outgrew narrow limits of a small Jewish sect and became wide-spread movement. The early history of caritative social work shows many examples of advanced system taking care not only for the souls of the people but for their social welfare as well. It is well-known that Eastern Church fathers were both key theologians and active makers of the Christian social platform. Never again in its further history the attitude of the Christian Church towards socially marginalized people was so emphatic. The then-formulated principles of the social application of Christian faith were used as fundamentals for social life even in Europe as well. These are principles formulated within Eastern Christian *milieu* and accepted in the European social thinking even if they were not always explicitly described as “Christian”.

¹ In the Church of Christ, Truth is one as indeed it should be. Historically it is one, common to all the faithful of the Church, and unchanging. But the early theological tradition of the Church in the East – through the fourth century – central to the developing traditions of the Church in both East and West. The doctrine of Trinity, formulated at the Church Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (380) under the leadership of Alexandrian bishops, remains central and is confirmed in Christianity (*see The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, 2002, p. 94).

At this level one can gauge the extent to which both institutions and mentalities are imbued with and shaped by Eastern Christianity, even in the absence of any explicit reference to the religious traditions involved in the development of the civilizations' values.

It may seem paradoxical, even provocative, to emphasize the ongoing process of the elimination of Eastern Christian understanding of social principles and *caritas* as a background prospect of possible social cohesion. Author of the article does not seek to disparage secular ethical standards potential of European societies, but expresses the thought it's worth examining the significance of referring to the European religious bedrock in terms of heritage in understanding caritative common social life principles. As we know the question of memory is raised obsessively, most specifically in societies in which there are risks of loss of memory because of the rapid rate of change.

Modern European societies which have change as their motor and their imperative, must be more anxious about keeping "flame of memory" alive. Religion, as Western thinker E. Durkheim has put it in *The elementary forms of religious life* (1995), is "eminently social". The predilection for commemoration is a modern and even ultramodern one. For Europe an act of commemoration, i.e., principles of social coexistence are at the same time a way of negotiating its attitude to its own history. What Europe's religious principles first and foremost are about? For the most part, they're about wars – often bloody wars – setting groups and entire nations against each other. The reference to religious history as heritage is a way of assuaging the dark memory of the religious wars in Europe. Unfortunately, it serves the convergent contribution in Christianity to the creation of the values and works which now form a bond between Europeans.

Remembrances of Europe's Christian heritage contribute to the commonly shared worldview. How we treat that specificity and how we acknowledge it as a presence in the public sphere is a matter of whether we view Christian religion as archaic survival condemned to destruction by social development or as a constitutive inherited value that is a seed in its way to social reasoning with its own coherence and continual social relevance. This is the question of explicit acknowledgments of the religious presence (Martin, 2006, p. 84). Therefore in our try to understand the nature of the Church we grasp the essence of caritative society, i.e., society of people built on principles of fraternity. The article emphasizes the importance of the Eastern Christian civilizational matrix as a healing alternative.

2. Caritative Social Work – the Most Ancient form of Human Fraternity

Caritative social ministry is among the most ancient forms of human fraternity, and Eastern Church has built upon its own tradition since then. It originated in Jerusalem in first century AD and its principles were soon formulated: mutual support, cooperation, direct management of almsgiving, diverse resources of support². Today Caritative social ministry is well-organized form of human solidarity and social work model caring for socially marginalized people lost in their solitude and sufferings. Caritative social ministry (called “Caritative Social work in modern times) always has been one of the most important forms social ministry of the Church and society by large.

Christianity is social by its essence, as ancient Latin saying goes: *Unus christianus nullus christianus* (“One Christian is not a Christian”). No-one can become genuinely Christian by isolating himself or herself from other people. We are speaking about personal freedom – our freedom is not just personal but rather inter-personal. We people cannot attain freedom by isolation from communication with our brethren. Genuine freedom requires association with other free persons. Freedom is not achieved by being and acting alone – it is always found through socialization. We are free when we are ‘*prosopon*’ – Greek term for “personality”, lit. “face”, “appearance”, i.e., only through addressing others, looking into their eyes and by permitting others to look into ours. To turn away, to abdicate from communication – it means declining from freedom. Freedom is always social, and it works through meeting with others (Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch, 2008, p. 34).

Christians were community, i.e., assembly of the “called out” (*ecclesia*’ in Greek). In this sense continuity between the Old and Testament was obvious. Generally speaking, the Hebrew theory of charity was more advanced than that of pagans. It was motivated by obedience to God and genuine sympathy for the miserable. One of its principles was expressed by words of Jahveh in the Bible: “May there is no beggar or needy among you.” Rich ones were warned that their possessions are from God and they are just stewards. Widows, orphans, blind, lame enjoyed special sympathy and received support. Gleanings of the field were left for those in needs and during the Shabbat year they were permitted to take everything

² The notion of love and fraternity is widely described in the Book of Acts and Epistles in the Bible, especially in those written by apostle Paul. First Christians were “of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them” (Acts 4: 32, 34). Every local Church had some stocks for those in need and they supported each other in disaster even from distance: Jerusalem received support from Antioch in times of famine (see Acts 11: 29; Romans 15: 25–27; Galatians 2: 10; see: Gapp, 1935, p. 258–265).

what grew wild. Moneylenders and usurers were not permitted to take interest from their fellow Hebrews and strangers in their land. However, the Hebrew system was nationally limited by essence (especially in regard to excessive interest from strangers etc.). In last centuries of their existence as chosen nation Hebrews moved far away from both the spirit and letter of their own excellent legislation in those matters. The existing Hebrew system was meant for short-term use or in some extraordinary situations or calamities. Actually, there are signs that Hebrews had any sort of charity system before destruction of the Second Temple (Seccombe, 1978, p. 140–143). This is why Christ condemned rulers for being greedy, hypocrite and giving alms only because they want to be seen by men.

The Church of Christ is called “New Israel”: nation of the covenant, “holy nation, My possession among the peoples” (Exodus 19: 5), the Church. Indeed, the general term “Christianity” (religion) is of later origin; originally these people were known as “brethren”, that is – a new social entity. Whole organization of brethren was communitarian and corporate. The Christian model was indeed a new one; even the Sacraments of the Church were communitarian by essence since they tied all members of the Church in unity. As Justin Martyr testifies in his “Apologia” (I, 67), all donations and offerings were collected and distributed to the poor by the officiant of the Eucharist (*‘proestoos’ in Greek*) and deacons delivered the support only to those who were not present in the Liturgy.

The idea of solidarity, righteousness and subsidiarity is stressed in all key Church-related texts from at that time. Although majority of texts are related to theological issues and combat against heresies, there is a lot of Information about topical social issues of the day. Social issues were reflected even in pure dogmatic treatises dealing with Three Persons in One by Cappadocian Church Fathers in the 4th century (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus). Highly technical theological discussions served as foundation for teaching that all members of the Church are accepted as members of one body. Although neither the concept of righteousness or “human rights” was described in comprehensive system, still closer analysis shows that the Cappadocian fathers stressed connection between theological and social issues. People, even the lepers, were created “in the image of God” and such they were created “in the image of the Triune God” – meaning that God of Christians is not only God the Person, He is God Inter-personal, God the Triad: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is not a monad, but rather triad – Three Persons united in unending movement of mutual love and cooperation described as *‘perichoresis’* in Greek. St. Basil the Great wrote that “God is in the center of the mystery of community (i.e., sociality)” (see “Against Eunomius”).

Consequently, if we people are created in the image of the Triune God, then everything what has been just said about God refers to people as well. We are called to proclaim and to exemplify unending turnaround of mutual love between us. Doctrine of Trinity – God as Community-Within-Himself, God being corporate – is our social programme. And every community – enterprise, school, city, even the state – is called to become a living icon of Trinity in its own right (Зизиулас, 2012, с. 17).

The Eastern doctrine of God was later accepted as shared heritage of the Christian Church both in the East and West. However, corporate elements are marked in the Eastern tradition and until today they constitute ethos of Eastern Orthodox Christianity against the Western subjective individualism (the opposition has been stressed by too many authors in a long tradition to mention them here). My purpose is not to claim that all social aspirations of Christian faith were materialized in the Eastern practice. Never ideals are materialized fully. The Church is still moving on *in via*. And we just have to accept that Eastern Christianity has suffered many defeats in its aspirations to achieve caritative integrity within its society. However, ideals should not be downgraded. They serve as both guiding principles and ruling forces in human lives.

The East always has enjoyed clear vision of corporate character of Christian faith. Despite many hardships and obstacles in its history Eastern Church possesses strong social instinct. And here is the key to what the Eastern Church can offer to prospects of social ministry today.

Early Church was not just another community with its own peculiar “religious” aspirations. It was *new* community, new *humanity*, ‘*polis*’ or ‘*politeuma*’ (“*arrangements of state*” in *Greek*), a city of God in making. Every local congregation understood itself as a part of an all-embracing and universal wholeness. The Church was presented as a new social dimension. The first Christians separated themselves from the social order of the time, and the Church was “the right order”, the right territory for the “citizenship on the Earth” (Philippians 3: 20). Close ties between religious and social dimension in the Early Church is characterized by the fact that some key terms used to name leaders of the Church were actually taken from social support system (e.g. ‘*episkopos*’ and ‘*presbiteros*’) (see Lindsay, 1903, p. 116). They held to this concept also later, when the Empire harmonized closer to the Church (see Флоровский, 2005, сс. 596–608).

The position of early Christians persisted in the movement of monasticism which developed rapidly after reconciliation with the world outside seemingly happened. To be sure, monasticism was complex, but its dominant progression was socially engaged. Generally speaking, it didn’t present running away from the world but rather a try to establish new, alternative world on different foundations. Monastery is community, a “small church” – not only for those who pray, but also

a community for those who labor. Laboring was essentially important and idle were treated as those who have bad virtue. And the labor was corporate and it was aimed at mutual benefit.

Improvement of society was in the focus of works of one of the three great Cappadocian fathers St. Basil the Great, bishop of Cesarea. With great concern he followed developments of social life and discovered inconsistencies with principles of mutuality and solidarity there. His life is that of synthesis of monasticism and social engagement. Following monastic examples of Egypt and Palestine Basil the Great worked on implementation of principles of solidarity between members of society where they had lost their social responsibility and human fraternity. According to Basil the Great people are called to communication and interaction and not to solitude and separation. This is the key theme of his homilies during the drought famine in Cesarea “To the rich” (*see* Basil the Great, 2018); “I will tear down my barns” and “In the time of drought and need” (*see* On social justice, 2009).

His statements are clear: no-one is in position to fulfill his life as a Christian away from solidarity with others. Monastery by itself is not the highest achievement of spiritual life; rather it shows right direction of how one should think about spirituality. Christians must show an example of alternate society opposite to powers of egoism and greed of the secular world. True unity between people can be achieved only in society with a common goal and by ability to submit individual needs to the needs and interests of all. That principle is described by use of a wonderful Greek term ‘*epanisou*’, which literally means “to regain balance”. The principle can be illustrated by the quote from the St. Basil’s homily “To the rich”: “Bread you take away belongs to the hungry; clothing you keep in your wardrobe belongs to the naked; shoes you let to rot without wear belong to the barefooted; silver you hide in the earth belongs to the poor.” On the other hand, they who live by the law of private property and competition are called ‘*akoinonētai*’ in Greek, i.e., “asocial”, “not friendly”.

In many ways it was social experiment on a broad scale. Obedience rooted in brotherly love and mutual trust and solidarity. Emphasis put on corporeality of human nature, and individualism treated as self-destructing power. Corporate life was essential to Christians, also to the married ones. Is it possible to create Christian society as a “monastery” of sorts? Another great preacher and theologian St. John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople (ca 350–470), agreed without delay and no doubts. He shared conviction that rejection of other people is deeply rooted in greed and possession of things at expense of needs of other people. Along with Cappadocian fathers he stressed that the only true possessor of everything in the world is God, Creator of all things, and people are just stewards and managers, and they should use those gifts for Divine purposes, i.e., for benefit of all. His concept

of property rights was functional: possession is permitted only in case of balanced use for good of all people. Sure, St. John Chrysostom was not a social or economic reformer and his thinking may look naïve. However, he was one of these great prophets of social equality, solidarity and righteousness. His call for charity and shared love is far from emotional for indeed, true Christian love is not just sheer caritative “feeling”. It had theological proof. Christians were not only touched by sufferings, poverty and rejection on sole human grounds. They were called to accept social calamities as outcome from sufferings of Christ, and the morale pathos of St. John Chrysostom’s is rooted in clear Vision of the Body of Christ. It gave and extra power to Christian charity.

One can argue that little of this powerful social proclamation has been actually converted into practice. On the other hand, it should be remembered that social proclamation of the Church was burdened by enormous limitations – and therefore the Church acted by assuring people rather than pushing them. Of course, there is no Church in the world enduring temptation to use the worldly power in some way or the other – be it the State, opinion of society or any other kind of social pressure. In whatever case the results didn’t justify limitations or violation of freedom. It proves our inability to implement pure Christian principles. Despite urge to attain social improvements the Church always emphasized transformation of human heart and mind rather than change of outward arrangements. The early Church did its best to implement heightened social norms within its own circles. However, its achievements were relative, and later its principles were reduced. It wasn’t due to reconciliation with the existing social injustice but rather to recognition of the inner antinomy. Was the Church permitted to use any other weapon for its existence but word and charity? But nevertheless, *the basic principles were formulated* and they should be hung unto to in any given historical situation.

They were, firstly, recognition of *equality* of all people. The spirit of egalitarianism is deeply embedded in the body and soul of the Eastern Christianity. There is no place for race / social discrimination in Eastern Christianity despite its highly hierarchical structure.

Second, it is generally accepted that the Church *must take care* for needy, rejected, marginalized. For those who confess before all. Eastern Christianity portrays Christ as the Humiliated One, but in His humility there is nobility and empathy for all. Western observers may find the Eastern charity overstated, but it stems from the concept that the Church is a hospital for the sick rather than abode for stout and perfect. That concept always had deep impact on social thinking in the East where solidarity with those in need and sick has been stressed over plans to build up perfect society. Direct human relationships surpass even the most perfect schema. And any given social problem is seen first as a problem of morals;

but the morality is rooted in the Incarnation of Christ and His Atonement on the Cross. These motifs are emphasized in both popular preaching and academic texts of the Church fathers (e.g., “We seek salvation together, whereas being alone we sin.”). The Church has always been on the side of humiliated and not the mighty and proud.

Third, the inherited social instinct turns the Church into a *spiritual homeland*, habitat, where one longs to abide – and not into an authoritarian establishment. All those who want to have an insight in the inner spiritual life of the Eastern Church should accept it as a starting point of its worldview.

The Church is community of solidarity which requires wholeness of a person in ministry, and it offers healing and renewal of the whole person, and not only of his “soul”. Even if the Church is not ready to stand on the road of open social activity, Christians still should stay with their civil tasks and obligations, since their vision of the self is social.

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