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The Contribution of the Parish to the Church Unity

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the mission of the parish in the larger context of the Church's witness to Christ and His salvific work for all mankind. The parish is seen as a geographical and spiritual space where the priest performs liturgical and pastoral-missionary activities, proposing a genuine Christian religious experience. The parish activity is carried out mainly on four levels: liturgical, didactic, cultural and philanthropic.

Keywords:

Parish, Romanian Patriarchate, mission, society

I. Introduction

The human person is missionary by nature, in that he confesses what he sees, knows and believes. The desire to see what exists beyond this world has made man aware that he is immortal. In the cool of heaven, the man "heard" God (Genesis 3, 7-11) and he confessed he is "naked". When man

is emptied of God's presence, he cannot see and confess Him in the world.

Incarnation, Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Saviour Jesus Christ have revealed to humans the only connection with God the Source of Life and the Way to Everlasting Life. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14, 6).

The confession of Christ and of the Gospel in the world began with the Holy Apostles and their descendants, that is why the parish community and each individual Christian is called to confess the truth of faith: "Whoever confesses me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven. But who denies me in front of others, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 10, 32-33).

In a world even now marked by heretics, sectarians, atheists, "Christians" fighters against their own Church, the words of Saint Ignatius Theophorus come to strengthen us in the faith confession and the unity of the Church:

"Make a real effort, then, to stand firmly by the orders of the Lord and the apostles, so that «whatever you do, you may succeed» (Ps 1, 3) in body and soul, in faith and love, in Son, Father, and Spirit, from first to last, along with your most distinguished bishop, your presbytery (that neatly plaited spiritual wreath!), and your godly deacons"¹.

Like the world as a whole, the parish is a place of witnessing the gospel by clergy and believers, all time and with all being, with strong faith and sacrificial love. The parish represents a geographical and spiritual space where the priest performs liturgical and pastoral-missionary activities, proposing a genuine Christian religious experience.

According to the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the parish is

"the community of Orthodox Christians, clergy and laymen, located on a given territory and subordinated to the eparchial

¹ *Scriverile Părinților Apostolici*, Traducere, note și indici de Pr. Dr. Dumitru Fecioru, Ed. Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1995, p. 202.

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centre in terms of canonical, juridical, administrative and patrimonial matters, led by a parish priest named by the diocesan leader (archbishop or bishop) of the respective diocese”².

The priest can perform missionary activities in the parish through:

1. The Holy Services;
2. Sermon or teaching words;
3. Cultural activities;
4. Philanthropic activities;

In these activities, the priest does not work alone, but is helped by the grace of God, parishioners and people from other places.

II. Mission of the priest through the holy services

The priest performs the holy services in the church, but also in the parish community. The Seven Services and the Divine Liturgy are performed in the worship place where parishioners can participate in praying to God, partake of the Holy Mysteries, and be in communion with their fellows.

The Divine Liturgy and the Seven Services introduce those who participate in the history of the salvation of the human race, starting from the Old Testament and then continuing with the New Testament, culminating in the life, deeds, Passions, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. These services make us contemporary with the biblical history and prepare us for partaking of the Body and Blood of the Saviour Jesus Christ: “The one who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6, 54).

The readings, the prayers and the gestures the priest makes during the service (the sign of the cross with the gospel, the sign of the cross saying “Peace to all”) have deep meanings that carry us to the Son of God and His work in the life of those who believe in him. Through them, the priest and the singer have the role of carrying us from earth to heaven, by living and experimenting the Kingdom of God in advance in the church.

² *Statutul de Organizarea și Funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, Hotărârea Guvernamentală Nr. 53/2008, published in: *Monitorul Oficial al României*, Part I, Nr. 50/Tuesday, 22nd of January 2008, București, 2008, Section I, Chapter A, Article 43, p. 10; as well as according to canons 2, 31 and 39 Apostolic, 8/IV Ecumenic; 14/VII Ecumenic; 9 Antioch and 10 Carthage).

Church services and painting also have the pedagogical role of making us partakers at moments of transfiguration of earthly life: “Standing in the temple of Thy glory, we seem to stand in heaven; O Theotokos, gate of heaven, open unto us the door of thy mercy”³.

The sacraments are usually done in the church, with few exceptions, and they serve the purpose of sharing the grace of God in different situations and stages of life and ministry.

Understanding each of the Seven Holy Mysteries determines the awareness of the importance of the grace received by the believer and how he can work it effectively in order to multiply the gifts of God in the stages of his earthly life. By performing them in the parish community, the priest has the opportunity to strengthen the bond between the parishioners, God and the Church, and to make each Christian believer and family a missionary and confessor of the truth of faith revealed by the Son of God.

III. The sermon - means of mission in the parish

Through sermon bishops and priests have an instrument of confession and a means of guidance for understanding the Holy Scripture. The interpretation of Scripture by the Apostle Paul, the Holy Fathers and their descendants makes the teaching of the Saviour Jesus Christ accessible to every Christian, as divine truth revealed to the attainment of eternal life and not to perdition.

The history of the Church gives us the opportunity to see the multitude of Gospel preachers and the books written and printed over the centuries towards the enlightenment and salvation of the world. After the Holy Gospel (*New Testament* from Bălgrad, *Bible* from București etc.), *Cazania*, *Învățăturile lui Neagoe către fiul său Teodosie*, *Didahiile* of Holy Hierarch Anthim the Iberian are some sources from which the soul of the Romanian Christian drank “the words of eternal life”.

The priest has these “springs” at hand and many other possibilities through which, if well prepared, the preaching or the word of teaching in the church and parish can touch the souls of the parishioners and build their life with grace and divine food: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt 4, 4).

³ Ceaslov, Ed. Institutul Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2014, p. 88.

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The priest's sermon can illuminate and strengthen, convince and determine the lives of parishioners in fulfilling their Christian duties. The priest's word has great power, so it is necessary that he be very careful and responsible about everything he says in the place of worship and the circumstances of the parochial life.

The thorough, theological and scientific preparation of the priest contributes to the success of his mission in the parish. He does not represent himself, but represents the Church and her head, that is, the Saviour Jesus Christ. The grace he received makes him responsible, and gives him honour, strength, but also sacrifice.

Thus, the preparation of the priest for preaching should not cease after the completion of theological studies, but should continue by deepening new information to complete the horizon of knowledge.

Today the word or words are easily dealt with, sometimes empty of content, and their message is often incoherent and inconsistent. The listener's attention is often superficial because of scattered thoughts and agitated life, lack of patience, ignorance, indifference, etc.

In this fallow field, the priest must penetrate the heart of man and parishioner, with a living and argued message that vibrates consciousness and determines the will to practice the Gospel teachings.

The priest's "weapons" to win the battle with sin, unbelief, indifference, selfishness, and formalism of some parishioners are the grace of God and the word of the Gospel.

Depending on how these "weapons" are used, the priest convinces and transfigures the parochial community by ascending it to Tabor or descending it into the "valley of the complaint".

In the teaching activity, the priest has now many means of communicating the word that builds up souls. The priest can use telephone and the internet with all its programs in the church mission to communicate with parishioners (young and old) both when they are in the parish (especially in the cities) and when they are away from home for a while.

These are only means of linking and transmitting the evangelical message and practical counsel, until people meet face to face in the church, where the joy of communication, prayer and communion of service and Sacraments is amplified.

In these times when many families and parishioners are settled and work for a period of time abroad and some families are even divided

between home and abroad, the mission of the priest is very necessary to diminish the negative effects, to preserve the unity of the Christian family, to preserve the faith Orthodox, for the moral and material support of those affected by the changes in their lives. The parish church can make Romanians living abroad feel at home in the house of God.

The edifying word, the continual prayer, and the material help given by the priest to the parishioners in the situation described above solves the problems, alleviates suffering and can maintain authentic Christian life.

Man's exploitation of human beings, human trafficking, and all inhuman and anti-Christian practices found in the world worry and render us accountable at the level of each parish, as we lead the community and keep awake the conscience of Christians and of the decision-makers in the local and central state government.

These include the laws of unnatural practices in people's lives, marriages of persons of the same gender, prostitution, etc., non-binding of religion classes, which are attitudes and works that destruct the human person, the Christian family and the Romanian people.

The priest and the parishioners must face these challenges and transgressions by actions to combat them, to raise awareness of the evil produced and to reject them from private and public life.

In vigil and in missionary activity, the priest must be a model of life, with strong word and entrepreneurial spirit in defending family, school, and church.

The formalism of priestly sermons affects the life of the parish and blocks the communication of the values of Orthodoxy in the context of scientific evolution, the modernization of society and the renewal of generations of Christians.

Therefore, in the preparation and utterance of the sermon the priest must be anchored in Holy Scripture and Tradition and oriented to the real needs of the parishioners.

Does the priest's word still have "much power" to persuade the parishioners to live Christian life, to strengthen in faith, to comfort in suffering, and to make each soul identify with the gospel message? Of course, Christ promised us: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" (Luke 21, 15). Do all clerics use the power that comes through the grace of the Holy

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Spirit? Mostly the clergy respond to the call of the Church and the priestly conscience for the fulfilment of the missionary service.

The Holy Apostle Paul, Saint John Chrysostom and many other servants of the *incarnate Word* remain models of preachers for the Church clergy.

IV. Parish mission through cultural activities

The spiritual-cultural heritage of the Church in general and of the parish in particular, makes the priest responsible for preserving the cultural heritage of the community and for dynamizing its *life* through valorisation actions, be it the church as historic monument, the spiritual-cultural heritage, or whether we are referring to the national or local cultural identity.

The man as “priest of creation” is called by God to sanctify and transfigure the world by divine grace and good works, and even more the sacerdotal priest is.

Christian culture is part of the richness of the Christian Church and of every Christian nation. Through its liturgical dimension, the parish relates to this national and universal cultural heritage. Looking in history, we notice that there is a connection between Church worship and culture. “The direct and personal connection of the creative man with God-the Creator of the universe is called worship. The connection of man with the world as creation of God is called culture”⁴.

There are many testimonies that show the Church worship inspired culture.

We have many parishes with churches - historical monuments, with painting and architecture art that reveal pages from the Bible and the Tradition of the Church to the Christian and the pilgrim. At the same time, these old monumental churches remind us of the founders, the painters and all those who contributed to their ascension and sanctification, being constituted in “altars of the memory” and documents of worship of the Christian generations for which the priest and the parish community pray that God may reward them with the joy of dwelling in the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ †DANIEL, Mitropolitul Moldovei și Bucovinei, *Dăruire și dănuire. Raze și chipuri de lumină din istoria și spiritualitatea românilor*, Ed. Trinitas, Iași, 2005, p.72.

“When worship born culture, it opened to universality, and when culture was inspired by worship, it opened to eternity”⁵.

Thus, the priest that performs the Church worship is called upon to cultivate the cultural traditions together with empowered institutions and parishioners.

Painting icons on wood or glass, national costumes, folk songs, carols (folk creations) and so on are part of the culture of our Romanian nation. Moreover, through personal involvement and organization of events, the priest contributes to the preservation of culture and its perpetuation.

Alongside Christian worship, Romanian culture has contributed and contributes to the preservation of the dignity of the nation and its continuity in history.

We note with concern that with the diminution and aging of the population in the villages, as the young people go abroad or in urban areas, there are no longer human resources to be involved in cultural and even educational activities (many schools have closed down by merging, museums and libraries closed as well). Therefore, the priest also encounters difficulties in keeping of Christian traditions related to the Mystery of Baptism, Marriage and Christian Feasts.

Many schools in the villages are closed because of the lack of students, many houses are deserted and destroyed, and the image of such villages is desolate. There are cases when the priest in such rural localities may have a Baptism and a Wedding a year and several funerals.

Therefore, only priests from parishes with young people and children and from cities are able to carry out cultural and traditional actions by which Christian and cultural identity can be maintained for generations.

Man's love of God, fellow humans, nature and beauty can preserve a dynamic Christian-cultural tradition by dedication, fidelity and creativity. The priest can and must cultivate these virtues in the service of the Church and the Romanian culture.

V. Mission of the parish through philanthropic activities

The church is a hospital where people are healed and not a court of law, says St. John Chrysostom, looking at the pattern of serving men who is the

⁵ †DANIEL, Mitropolitul Moldovei și Bucovinei, *Dăruire și dăinuire...*, p. 72.

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Saviour Jesus Christ: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20, 28); (see *The healing of the paralytic from Capernaum*, Matt. 9, 1-8 and other healings).

Of course, the Church serves the world (man), but it must not become its slave, be used and dominated by the world.

There is already a philanthropic tradition of the Church from which each diocese and parish can be inspired, continuing the care and actions of relieving the soul and physical sufferings of people. In each parish, there are old, sick and poor people, orphaned children and disadvantaged people. Christ God is present in every baptized person, and every man bears His image. That is why the command of love toward the neighbour is in fact serving Christ (see Matt. 25, 31-46): “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13, 34).

In an increasingly selfish, indifferent and insensitive world to human suffering, he urges us to be merciful: “Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6, 36).

In addition to the secular institutions concerned with social and philanthropic activities, the Church has established philanthropic and medical establishments: dispensaries, hospitals, asylums, child and elderly care centres, social canteens, etc.

In our country, we know favourable historical periods when the Church has been involved in many social-philanthropic activities.

Until the 17th century, the Church supported most social and philanthropic activities through monasteries. After the secularization of the monasteries made by Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1864), these actions supported by the Church diminished because of the lack of material support.

After the Unification of the Romanian Principalities and the secularization of ecclesiastical assets, social and philanthropic societies or associations were organized in the eparchies of our Church, such as: the Society of the Romanian Clergy *Binefacerea* (1882) in Iași; *Sfânta Cruce* (1901); *Mântuitorul Hristos* (1909), transformed in *Ocrotirea* (1910) in Galați and Iași; *Solidaritatea* in Galați, *Harul* in Roman; *Sprijinul* in Bucharest; then during the First World War was organized *Societatea Orfanilor de Război* (1917); Society *Pâinea Săracilor*; and later Society *Caritatea creștină* (1936); and during the Second World War the Society

Sprijinul Orbilor from Romania was organized (1939) and also *Fondul milelor* (1940) in Iași⁶.

Parishes and monasteries have worked with Red Cross Society, with schools and hospitals to provide social and philanthropic assistance to orphans, students, poor, sick people from hospitals and those suffering from hunger and deprivation. Saving of human lives was the priority of the Church and the concern of the clergy⁷.

Thus, after the *First World War and the Unification of 1918*, our Church tried and managed to develop social activities, that at the beginning of 1936, out of 521 social assistance units, 50 were state units and 471 associations functioned in Church framework⁸.

It was known that parishes have a tradition in the conduct of social-philanthropic activities, so that, when time was right, they were developed.

In the interwar period, the brilliant Bishop of Râmnic Vartolomeu Stănescu (1921-1938), with sociology and law studies at Sorbonne, initiated the organization of the “Evangelical Society” in order to support the educational, cultural and social-philanthropic activities of his eparchy⁹.

At the level of all parishes in Oltenia, Christian women were required to support the Christian objectives of the “Evangelical Society”, which were:

1. “The physical health of all people in this eparchy, women and men, by using hygiene, which the special scientific treatises will show how to preserve and reconcile it, to strengthen our physical forces;
2. To educate all social layers, to support each other on the economic, cultural and religious-moral level, harmonizing them through this mutual support in a single family, as mothers, fathers, daughters and sons;

⁶ Arhimandrit Lector Dr. Emilian NICA, *Aduceți-vă aminte de înaintașii voștri. Arhiepiscopia Iașilor între anii 1900-1948*, Ed. Doxologia, Iași, 2009, pp. 300-313.

⁷ Arhimandrit Lector Dr. Emilian NICA, *Aduceți-vă aminte...*, pp. 318-319.

⁸ Florica MĂNOIU, Viorica EPUREANU, *Asistența socială în România*, Ed. ALL, București, 1996, pp.10-13.

⁹ †Emilian LOVIȘTEANUL, Episcop-Vicar al Arhiepiscopiei Râmnicului, *Foreword to †Vartolomeu STĂNESCU, Episcopul Râmnicului Femeia în Biserică, familie și societate* (the first edition was issued in 1934 under the title *Femeia ca factor social*), edition managed by †Emilian LOVIȘTEANUL, Episcop-Vicar al Arhiepiscopiei Râmnicului, Ed. Sfântul Antim Ivireanul, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 2011, p. 9.

3. The appropriation of Christian virtues, which the times of civilization and progress of today not only demand, but also force us to translate them into deeds, and deeds in morals; and morals in a second nature; in the way of hereditary transmission to our offspring”¹⁰.

The care of Bishop Vartolomeu for the good of the diocese has resulted in many philanthropic actions carried out by parishes and charitable societies, among which “Renașterea” (1924).

World War II and drought between 1946 and 1947 in the Moldavian region determined the Metropolitan, through its hierarchs and priests, to take measures to help affected families and war orphans.

Through two forms of social assistance, closed assistance and open care, Bishop Justinian Marina, supported by clergy, nuns and laymen, helped approximately 40,000 orphaned and suffering children¹¹.

With the establishment of the communist regime in our country, the social-philanthropic activity of the Church has been minimized.

In this time of restraint, despite all the oppressors, Patriarch Justinian managed to create resources for the social activities of the Church contained in the biblical phrase “Social Apostle”.

Throughout the period of persecution and social barriers, in some parishes and monasteries, priests and abbots however organized philanthropic activities.

Since 1990, the Romanian Orthodox Church has resumed its mission in addition to liturgical activity, in accordance with the provisions of the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Art. 53, letter c.d.p.; Art. 69,70,72, 94 letter f; Art. 100 and 170). In addition, by the Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church dated May 27, 1997, the foundations of the social existence network of the church units were established: patriarchy, dioceses, deaneries and parishes.

In 2014, the Romanian Patriarchy carried out a rich social and philanthropic activity within 785 social institutions and services.

¹⁰ † Vartolomeu STĂNESCU, *Episcopul Râmnicului, Femeia în Biserică, familie și societate*, pp. 22-23.

¹¹ Arhimandrit Lector Dr. Emilian NICA, *Aduceți-vă aminte...*, p. 316.

In the dioceses, deaneries and parishes of our Church there are several social-philanthropic settlements as follows:

“- 158 social canteens and bakeries; 51 institutions providing medical services and pharmacies; 85 day care centres for children; 14 day care centres for the elderly; 44 elderly residential centres; 29 community centres; 35 family-type centres; 38 kindergartens and after-school; 14 protected dwellings; 94 information, counselling and resource centres; 1 adult education institution; 21 emergency centres (for homeless people, victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking in human beings); 21 camp sites; 63 educational centres; 117 institutions with different specificities.

In the dioceses, at the level of the diocesan structures, 576 social projects and programs are in progress, out of which: 36 with external financing; 53 with public funding; 403 financed by own funds; 57 with mixed funding”¹².

For the benefit of the social-philanthropic services, priests, assistants, and volunteers were involved, who were remunerated on the one hand, and on the other hand, understood the needs of the units organized in this respect, as well as the sacrifice and mercy needed in the service of those in difficulty.

According to statistics and to what we see around us, in the last twenty-five years in Romania the sick, the poor and the lonely people are more and more.

Amid small number of hospitals, nursing homes, social centres, etc., and often poorly equipped, the Church ministers and its material resources focussed on the support of those suffering.

Above all, let us not forget that

“The Church has two arms that update the oeconomy of salvation: the pastoral-eucharistic, and the external missionary. Both are important for building and strengthening the Church:

¹² *Lumina* journal, Ediție națională, Nr. 27 (3024) year XV, Wednesday, 4th of February 2015, p. 5.

the Eucharist for the food of the people and the Annunciation of the Gospel for the conversion of nations”¹³.

In the parish, the priest must relate all social-philanthropic, cultural and educational activities to the Gospel and the Divine Liturgy.

Help in the ministry of the priest and parishioners comes from *the Lord, He who made the heaven and the earth*, therefore they hope in the power of the Saviour Jesus Christ coming through prayer, the Divine Liturgy and the Holy Mysteries.

In the Church, Christian philanthropy, social solidarity, and offering through Christian love carry the name of “Liturgy after Liturgy”.

By listening to the “Sermon on the Mount” spoken by the Saviour Jesus Christ, we understand that we cannot be happy without Him. Our happiness is the service of our neighbour and God.

We are happy when we give, when we bring a revival of life where the darkness of death flashes, when we bring comfort where there is suffering, when we offer love where there is hatred, sickness, loneliness and evil, having the consciousness that the Christian attitude blessed by divine grace transfigures the lives of the suffering people.

Understanding Christian virtues and putting them into practice must be the preoccupation of the priest in today’s parish, when often selfishness and personal interest prevail in human formalization and the desire to have a positive image and power in society affects philanthropic actions in their human depth.

We must not hide the fact that

“The modern world, in its quest for earthly happiness, has transformed the struggle of life into a struggle for power. In this struggle, the power, materialized in money (for money is nothing but a sign of a certain power to do whatever you want, in a world where everything you want can be bought) - has become anarchic, and by a reversal in social life, they had lost their middle function and became a value in itself”¹⁴.

¹³ Preot Mihai HIMCINSCHI, *Biserica în societate. Aspecte misionare ale Bisericii în societatea actuală*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2006, p. 80.

¹⁴ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, “Creștinul în lumea modernă”, in: Ioan I. ICA JR. and Germano MARANI, *Gândirea socială a Bisericii, fundamente, documente, analize, perspective*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2002, p. 88.

In a depleted country, where many people have gone abroad and the family is badly affected, Christian human happiness seems utopian, because the mentality and Christian-social values have been changed.

Looking around, we see the change of the Romanian society and the perverting of the human will in its ability to relate to the world and God.

“From the moment when the *possession* of earthly goods becomes the idol of modern man and *power*, the means of acquiring this possession, the more the individuals increase in power, and the more the possessed object is limited, the greater the antagonism between man and man, between the group and the group, is deepening”¹⁵.

The deification of the modern man in the spirit and perception of the Holy Fathers is difficult, but not impossible to be accomplished in the parish. Many people fast and pray, committing deeds of mercy and having a beautiful Christian life.

However, being realistic, the situation of the man depicted by Mircea Vulcanescu in the interwar period is still present in the Romanian society, in the urban or rural parish:

“The chart of the modern man’s moral values, which lost the vision of *another* life to which he was intended, is the total overthrow of the promise of joy in suffering and reward in glory, which the Sermon on the mountain brought about two thousand years ago: of poverty, of gentleness, of pure heart, of reconciling spirit, of mercy, of thirst for justice and of persecution suffered for it.

Blessed are those who are *satisfied* - this world answers to Christ, that they have the kingdom of this world and there is not another one.

Blessed are the *strong*, that they will possess the earth.

Blessed are the *cruel and ruthless*, for they will not fear anyone.

Blessed are those who *laugh and rejoice*, that they do not need anything.

¹⁵ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, “Creștinul în lumea modernă”, p. 86.

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Blessed are the *bold ones*, that they will have a feast.

Blessed are those who *sow the wind*, that they shall be called the sons of the storm.

Blessed are the *clever ones*, that they will find out the mystery of many things.

Blessed are you when they will *glorify you and incense you*, lying to you, that you have been paid now, on earth, and tomorrow who will remember you!

Richness is the supreme ideal of man who has longed to pull as much and as much earthly joy as possible into life, in a short respite allowed to man for it.

Power is the means to acquire wealth.

Skill, gossip, suspicion, cruelty, and self-praise are the tools you acquire the power with and hold it when you have it, and they make up the essential values of the *modern moral code*, even when hypocrisy strikes them in others, seemingly antagonistic.

They *spring directly from the demiurgic mentality* that I have depicted and are the *spiritual fruits* of the inner crash of a man who has lost the feeling of transcendence and its true self-notion that he was called to life for other miracles than to search for the earth's food"¹⁶.

Years of freedom of speech and ministry were used by the dioceses and the parish clergy in the reactivation and establishment of social and philanthropic services, so necessary in a Romanian society increasingly affected by poverty, unemployment, illness, family problems and other.

VI. Conclusions

I have shown above the number of activities undertaken by the Romanian Patriarchate up to the level of 2014. Even if the Romanian State bent on the social work, we note that the Church action was and is necessary through the administrative units that provide consistent support to those in difficulty.

¹⁶ Mircea VULCĂNESCU, "Creștinul în lumea modernă", p. 84.

The concerns and mission of the parish cannot remain indifferent to the existing human problems, just as Christ the Lord offers us as a model in the parable of the “merciful Samaritan” (Luke 10, 25-37).

Of course, the parish has evolved socially according to society. In the difficult years of communism, the entire life of the community focused on the parish. Together with the monasteries, she kept alive the spiritual life, guided the spiritual struggle, the souls to the Holy Mysteries, the oppressed to resistance, patience and hope.

“In our time, the Church (the parish) must not sleep, but remain incessantly awake, active and ready to bear the Cross for love of men, as an endeavour to help them, in the spirit of compassion, as Christ did. Our time is the time of service and compassion. The Church must show a spiritual servant who portrays people’s horizons of love and helps them ever forward to this horizon. After each disillusionment caused by an imperfect or false reality of their aspirations to this goal, it must give them a new courage to resume the path of love. In this sense, the Church always remains present and powerful”¹⁷. Paraphrasing St. Maximus the Confessor, the parish is the “Resurrection Lab”.

The parish represents the place where we are born for eternity, the place where we cross the way home to the Church, the place where we receive the Holy Sacraments, the place where we look for the Resurrection from the dead, and the Cross of Jesus Christ is the sign of victory over the world.

¹⁷ Pr. M. A. Costa DE BEAUREGARD and Părintele Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Mică Dogmatică vorbită - dialoguri la Cernica*, Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 1995, p. 43.