MORAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES — FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL UNITY

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Abstract: In this paper we aim to present the importance of the unity between citizen of society and one of the ways to obtain and preserve it. As an outstanding value, this unity has to be protected, nurtured and empowered by moral and religious values. Out of a multitude of such values we outlined the importance of the social wellness, freedom and some Christian virtues as faith, hope and love. We noticed that these virtues give us the power to look beyond the social crises, as Viktor Frankl did during his captivity in the concentration camps during the Second World War. Also, these virtues lead people to develop a proper and healthy attitude toward fellows and strengthens society.

Keywords: society, moral values, religious values, social unity, truth, faith, hope, love

1. The importance of social unity

The topic of social unity is always important and current as well. Keeping peace between people and eradication of social troubles has been a major theme throughout the history of mankind. Throughout the history of humanity, societies have always been crushed by tensions and struggles which eventually degenerated into social unrest, revolutions, resultingin the loss of thousands and thousands of human lives. Hate, on the basis of belonging to an ethnic or religious denomination, often broke into strong riots and social unrest. We have not yet wiped out the struggles from the former Yugoslavia, based on religious, political, ethnic, economic, and military reasons, which resulted in hundreds,thousands, even millions of victims. We must not forget that the first murder in the history of

mankind was based on the religious hatred that transformed Cain into a ruthless murderer (Gen. 4:8).

All forms of social organization, such as communities, institutions, and social groups, must have at least a set of common goals and common beliefs, otherwise these social groups will disintegrate. For example, better understanding among the members of these groups is beneficial because, in addition to psychological comfort, it leads to creativity, economic and cultural development. These groups held a dynamic component also. They develop numerically by including new people with experience and over time a specialization in specific field. However, we note that due to a certain degree of erosion, entering into a daily routine, there emerge tensions, frictions that in many cases lead to the disintegration of that group. Thus, families get divorced, political parties break, officials resign or are dismissed, and social groups are reconfigured.

Factors that erode the stability and tenacity of social unity are diverse. For example, the feeling of mistrust between spouses, marital infidelity or children's rebellion against their parents may appear in many families. These dysfunctions lead to tensions, quarrels, and ultimately, unfortunately will eventually break the family links. The harmony of communities can be disturbed by selfishness, envy or lack of honesty. Social groups may be affected by all sorts of rivalries or defective communications among the members of these groups too.

We noticed also that the moral and religious values are not voluntary values, they are compulsory, they strengthen the social unity and harmony between citizens. Referring to moral values, which transcend ethnic, cultural, political or religious boundaries, we have in mind those aspects that deepen trust among people as good, truth and freedom.

2. The perspective of Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti on social unity

Dimitrie Gusti, the founder of the science of sociology in Romania, said that man is a social being by his inner structure, he is a social being before participating in any inter-human activities. From his point of view, the social unity comprises of a group of people, who share a common life,

based on close ties between its members, bound bytheir basic affections, and especially by sympathy.[1]

We can see from this perspective that strong relationship and acceptance of peoples, despite their differences, is an important factor for social unity. Dimitrie Gusti identified three forms of social unity: (1) communities as families, that have strong and lasting ties; (2) institutions, consisting of civil actors, linked by economic benefits, and (3) social groups, based on common interests, such as sport clubs or literary associations.[2] Political parties are associations of people who share the same set of objectives, priorities and guidelines on social or economic policies.

A company, for instance, cannot function properly if there are major malfunctions within its organizations. Speaking of the political spectrum, no one expects that in a certain country's Parliament to be full harmony between the parties which form that Parliament, because there have to be different political orientation, left, center or right perspectives. Such general consensus can exist only in undemocratic countries where there is only one leading party. Despite all the differences of ideology and vision that exist between parties, however, all political parties have to make a contribution to achieve social cohesion. Social disintegration or disruption not only weakens the unity of a people but creates major tensions and misunderstandings within that society.

3. The role of social good and freedom toward a social unity

Among the many moral values that contribute toward social unity, we will refer here to the social good and freedom. The pursuit of social good, which claim the abolition of any form of selfishness and the emergence of the common good, is the duty of every individual and social actor. The common good transcends any kind of individualism, that has snaked deeper into the Romanian society. The individualist attitude and the selfishness, affects negatively the social cohesion, and according

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1   Dimitrie Gusti, „Îndrumări pentru monografiile sociologice", in *Institutul de Ştiinţe Sociale al României*, Bucharest, 1940, p. 376.

2   Gusti, Îndrumări pentru monografiile sociologice, p. 378.

to Berdiaev, individualism creates "a kind of atomization of society. Individualism is therefore essentially a kind of negative reform."[3]

We must not forget that man in his being is created to develop relationships, and his profile as a distinct person emerges only when he interacts with his fellows. The transition from individual to a person is accomplished through the bridge of conversation, dialogue, and personal meeting, a kind of face to face meeting. A strong society is one that encourages dialogue, communication and private initiative. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas has analyzed and developed the importance of the concept of social communication in the two volumes of his *magnum opus*, "The Theory of Communicative Action". Habermas noted that a meaningful communication is the product of human species development, but at the same time it is a distinctive mark of man toward other creatures. He noted that although technology has developed very much during our time, it cannot replace conversation, dialogue or debate between people, those human actions that underpin democracy and social development.

> "If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordina- tion is established through communication – and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement- then the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the condition of a rationality inherent in communicative action."[4]

The social goodness, however, is not only about the act of dialogue, it goes beyond it, and pursues toward good of others through concrete actions, charities and volunteering. Also, the social good is produced by a correct attitude towards work. Social prosperity includes economic prosperity, and it is based on ethics of work. Violation of the principles of ethics of work, or ethics of business will lead to the loss of trust between the actors involved in the business and the elimination of the culprit.[5]

Another important element for the development of social good is respecting and proclaiming the truth. Social unity cannot exist in a society that removes the barriers of truthand raises duplicity, lies or

3   Nicolae Berdiaev, *Un nou Ev Mediu*, Craiova, Omniscop, 1995, p. 36.

4   Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative action*, vol.1, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 1992, p. 397.

5   Eugen Jugaru, *Afaceri, muncă și credință*, Oradea, Casa Cărții, 2015, p. 24.

hypocrisy. Truth and transparency are the keysfor trust between people. The totalitarian political systems, that set forth a five years economic projection, that they did not reach, but which they reported as not only reached but also obsolete, but could not survive forever. Also, the attempt to camouflage the religious persecution in these countries, in its various forms, with false allegations of respect for human rights, has also ended.

The relations between people, whether we are talking about family, social or economic relationships, trust based on truth has an undeniable value. Banks collapse if depositors lose confidence in them, companies fail if employers lie to employees, families are breaking up and social welfare is undermined where trust is undermined.

Finally, the social good cannot take place in the absence of freedom. Deep social unity cannot be achieved by external constraint, but by a conscious and willing adherence to its value. It is obvious that we can talk about social unity achieved through the external constraint offered by legislation, but this unity is not profound, rather is ostensible one. When a person is aware of the importance of cohesion between himself and other social actors, then he does not accept to be only a passive element in this construct, but will be interested in being an active factor contributing to social unity too. Supporting social unity is the duty of any citizen, but this action must start from an inner impulse, from a personal inward conviction.

Human responsibilities in society are multiple, at the forefront being moral responsibilities. In this frame, freedom is the condition for fulfilling these moral responsibilities. In democratic society, every citizen must have the freedom to express himself and enjoy the framework of free expression. Through various religious public manifestations it made possible that religious communitiesbe known in society, by the way of celebration of certain religious events publicly, the whole society will gain a social benefit.[6]

An important role in maintaining social unity is religious freedom that "can not find its full meaning only within a sovereign state."[7]This freedom in my country is guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution in art. 29 (1): "Freedom of thought and opinion, as well as the freedom

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6   Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI., Zondervan, 2010, p. 504.

7   Antonie Compagnon, Jacques Seebacher, *Spiritul Europei*, vol.2, Bucharest, Polirom, 2002, p.86,

of religious beliefs can't be constrained in any way." Constraint has nothing to do with religion also because "it is not only immoral - it is counterproductive because it feeds either unbelief, hypocrisy or both."[8] The plurality of religious organizations and beliefs is a compulsory component of any democratic state. Nobody can be forced to give up his faith or to adopt a different faith despite his personal will.

Also, the freedom of the individual, involving his or her choice among several options, is an inalienable right that must be respected for social unity. According to Kant, freedom is an internal quality of the will, an expression of choice that is not constrained by internal factors (eg. fear of death) or by external factors.[9]

Man is a free agent, he is created to exist and express freely, but from a Christian perspective man's freedom is affected by sin. He is a created being, and accordingly the freedom that man enjoys is never absolute freedom but only relative one. Absolute freedom lies only in God, because He alone is absolute Spirit.[10]

The lack of freedom, as Dr. Victor Frankl has experienced in the concentration camps during the Second World War, leads to dehumanization, loss of dignity and self-esteem. In this state, the set of values gets to be questioned, and one thought continues to persevere: to remain alive at all costs.[11]

But, although the physical freedom of the detainees was suspended, Frankl understood that there was a kind of freedom that could not be affected by the wickedness of the guardians, it was "this spiritual freedom - which can't be taken - it is this which gives meaning and purpose to our life."[12] In Romania the freedom of the individual is guaranteed by the Constitution. The following articles sustain this affirmation: Article 23 (1) "Individual freedom and the security of the person are inviolable." Also, the set of freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution includes: freedom of conscience, thought, opinions, religious liberty (Article 29),

8   Compagnon, Seebacher, *Spiritul Europei*, p. 88.

9   Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure*, Bucharest, Iri Publishing House, 1994, p. 39.

10   Paraschiva Pop, *Regresia moralei*, Oradea, Cartea Creștină Publishing House, 2003, p. 59.

11   Viktor E. Frankl, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții*, tr. Silvian Guranda, Bucharest, Meteor Press, 2009, p. 63-64.

12   Frankl, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții*, p. 80.

freedom of speech (Article 30), freedom of religion (Article 32), freedom of assembly (Article 39) or economic freedom (Article 45).

That is why it is important to educate citizens to understand the value of social connection between people so that they can consciously and freely contribute to this desideratum.

4. The value of Christian virtues for realization of social unity

Faith, hope and love, these theological values or virtues, are fundamental values to a Christian society and indispensable for social unity. Living in a society called Christian society, it seems redundant to define Christianity, yet according to Mircea Vulcănescu, we understand that Christianity is more than a religion:

> "Christianity is a meeting of the human soul with an absolutely almighty presence, everywhere present, knowing everythingand working everything, of which we feel hanged as creation of the creator, whose being is for as norm, a law of behavior, because in it we acknowledge not only the full realization of our being to the maximum state we can aim; but also the fullness of all the perfections we can imagine in some way."[13]

The real faith in God crosses confessional boundaries, flattens doctrinal differences, and brings citizens closer to one another by contributing to social unity. From a Christian perspective, faith does not remain an abstract theological notion, but takes a practical shape in Christian deeds, in accepting people, and in pursuing their good. The Christian who actively practices faith will identify in his fellow the "neighbor" who is the bearer of the divine image. The phrase "man's image and likeness" with God not only conveys the aspect of differentiation between man and animals, but also affirm the idea of equality between people, an equality from which differences of gender, ethnicity, religion, economic, social, or political status are eliminate.[14] Faith makes profound spiritual transformation in human life, sensitizes people heart so that they can look at any citizen as their fellow, bearer of the divine image. This acceptance

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13   Mircea Vulcănescu, „Creştinul în lumea modernă", in *Gândirea socială a bisericii*, Ioan I. Ică jr., Germano Marani, Sibiu, Deisis, 2002, p. 77.
14   Cristopher J.H. Wright, *Misiunea lui Dumnezeu*, trad. Ciprian Flavius Terinte, Bucharest, Pleroma, 2016, p. 453.

and appreciation for others is not primarily based on the ability of people to accomplish certain major works, or to possess special abilities, but simply due to that *locus* which is the image of God found in all people.

Sometimes faith is defined as hope, but Christian faith includes more than hope, it includes certainty in divine promises. According to the Biblical definition, faith is: "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Heb.11: 1).

The objective basis of Christian faith is offered by the saving work accomplished by Jesus Christ. We can not speak of Christian faith excluding personal trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and in eternal rewards. Christian faith brings spiritual transformation into human life, enriches its spiritually, and confers confidence for the future. A faithful Christian becomes a strong supporter for his family, a diligent worker, a man of character who respects his given word.

Christian faith, in its biblical sense, levels the social differences between people and brings them closer to one another. A practical biblical example is presented in the epistle of the Apostle Paul to Philemon. Through passionate words, the apostle asked Philemon, a Christian owner of slaves, on the basis of their common Christian faith, to receiveOnesimus, the fugitive slave, not as a slave but as a "beloved brother."[15]

Although the Christian faith took into account the social position of each of the actors, Onesimus a slave and Philemon owner of slaves, yet on the spiritual level, he drew the two of them into the same spiritual family as children of God.

For Christian family life, faith becomes faithfulness, fidelity, trust and stable unity between spouses, between parents and children. The Christian family presents both a social dimension and a spiritual dimension to the world. Family union, based on the principles of Christian teaching, is fundamental to social unity and security. A society which is united and healthy is based on the strength of the Christian family.[16]

Hope is that spiritual dimension which targets beyond the present, aiming towards a better future that brings happiness beyond the hardships of the present time. Christian hope held a major eschatological

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15 The Epistle of Paul to Philemon, vers 16.

16 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru,"Familia – loc hărăzit de Dumnezeu pentru formarea caracterului", in *Argeșul ortodox*,Săptămânal teologic, bisericesc și de atitudine al Arhiepiscopiei Argeșului și Muscelului, Curtea de Argeș, year X, no 514, aug., 4–10, 2011, p. 5.

component, but also it takes into account the future of the social benefits, including social unity.

Although we can not deny the existing difficulties and realities in society that sometimes disappoint us, we must not even let them overwhelmedus nor permit them todeny our hope. Loss of hope is disastrous in any area of life as Viktor Frankl has noted very clearly. As we mentioned above, he experienced discouragement being a prisoner in concentration camps, but he was one of the few survivors from that human hell. Frankl's conclusion was that prisoners who had not lost their hope were more likely to survive than those who had been left to despair. Hope that detention will end some day, that prisoners will be released from the camp will be reunited with their families it was a strong moral support and a powerful obstacle againstcommitting suicide. He has repeatedly referred to Nietsche's statement that gives meaning to life and brings hope even in the darkest moments of life: "He who has a *why* to live for, can endure almost anything."[17]

Love, as a Christian virtue is not just a noble passenger feeling, but it involves the desire of sacrifice for the good of others. The nature of Christian love is superior to any other form of love because, in addition to redemption dimension, "makes it morally impossible for the believer to limit his love only to his friends or to those who are equal with him."[18]

It is a Christian theological truth that prior love for people must be the love for God, because He proved His love for humankind sending Christ to be the Savior of it. However, love for God from a Christian perspective becomes love for others, and this love strengthens social unity. The theologian Paul Tillich linked indissolubly the faith with love, and the love with acts. Ethical love brings transformation through self-assertion.[19] Frankl also praises love because this feeling highlights features of the beloved person, those features of character which we have not previously noticed. Love helps us to see the potential in the loved

17   Frankl, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții*, p. 89.
18   Carl F. Henry, *Etica creştină personală*, trad. Dragomir Agnes, Oradea, Cartea Creştină, 2004, p. 262.
19   Paul Tillich, *Dinamica credinţei*, Bucharest, Herald, 2007, p. 157.

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person and helps us to develop this potential, which previously was in a latent state.[20]

Apostle John concluded that, "For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20b). Likewise, Apostle Paul composed, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the noble hymn of love for a Christian community in which this feeling was affected by existing parties and divisions inside of the church. He points out that charisma, faith and generosity have no value in the absence of love (I Cor. 13:1-3). Love is personified in patience, kindness, lack of envy, of arrogance, selfless, love is confident and willing to suffer (I Cor. 13:4-7), love "will never perish" (I Cor. 13:8a).

Although it is difficult to imagine a society in which the Apostle's teachings applies to every member of that society, we must keep in mind that the genuine Christians, who apply the principles of the apostle Paul's doctrine to their lives, should manifest that profile of love in their behavior. Practicing Christian love, which is totally altruistic, and renouncing to selfishness and individualism, will bring social unity. The responsibility of the priests, pastors, opinion-makers is to embody that feeling of love and to pour it outto others. The right answer against the division of Romanian society is the application of Christian love to all the strata of society.

Conclusions

Social unity represent a great value and treasure of any nation. However, this unity must be nurtured, kept, sustained and protected continuously. The state of well-being, the fulfillment and satisfaction of citizens as well as freedom, all of these are very important factors for a societycontributing to the social good. That is why these issues are always required to be on the agenda of political leaders and of organizations which respect democracy. From a religious perspective, Christian values such as faith, hope and love, play an important role in preserving social unity. By faith, man looks beyond the present reality and identifies in his fellow man not only an individual person, but a being created in the image and likeness

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20   Frankl, *Omul în căutarea sensului vieții*, p. 124.

of God. By hope, man is given the power to overcome the difficult moments of life, as Viktor Frankl did in the concentration camps during the Second World War. Love is a powerful social bond that urges self-sacrifice for the good of others. Today, in Romanian society, where strong social cleavages are observed, it is necessary to bring back to the top and to practice, with honesty, these Christian virtues that unite citizensand consolidate the society.

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