

## Church Fathers contribution to economics and Church life

### Abstract

I will start from the statement that the preoccupation for economics (i.e. macroeconomics) is treated less in the Church Fathers' thinking. Instead, they insist indirectly (in almost all homilies and moral writings) on the *individual economics* (forefathers of today microeconomics) of every person, family and local Church. The basic principle and the aim of their inducements were the aid of poor people and the realising of a perfect communion of all people in one Church similar to the "future communion" they talked always about.

This can be due to follow reasons:

- a. During the period of the Church Fathers there was no separation between the Church and the state (empire), but rather a "symphony" between them.
- b. The Church and her mission were strongly sustained by the state/empire and the businesses of the state were often accomplished with the accord of the Church hierarchs.
- c. The Church Fathers' concern for economics and financial problems was a secondary one, being not a constitutive part of the Christian doctrine, but more related to ethics.
- d. The problem of economics was thought only as *means* for the administrative task of the Church and the realising of her duties and never a purpose in itself.

For the Fathers the economics has different nuances and effects. The charity constitutes a central theme in their thinking as it is a basic "pillar" in the Gospel of Christ. St Basil the Great write on his "Homily to the rich" that someone will be never poor or rich, if everyone keeps for himself only as much as he really needs. A few centuries after, some forefathers of economics will embrace the same conception facing tangled problems of financial system.

The Church also has a main duty to aid the poor people (spiritually and materially), but that has to be done in an organised manner, taking into account economic principles. St Basil the Great created a real social system of helping the poor people, orphans and old people, by establishing poorhouses, hospices, schools and hospitals ("Basiliad"), with economic precepts in his view. He affirmed that the Church must not think only to subsidize a social system, but she has to find a way for its own self-financing for all the time.

I will dare to motivate, if I may, that according to the Church Fathers' thinking, the economics should has also another purposes as it actually has in order to be achieved a real progress of the people and of the society. They often asserted that we must never separate the Liturgy from philanthropy and in consequence from the mission of the Church. The spirituality can become pietist, if it is not practically incorporated into the practice of serving our neighbour and into the social work of the Church. Vice versa, the social work can easy become self-sufficient humanism without the Liturgy.

The Church Fathers related the principles of economics to the spiritual and moral values. The predominance has the state of sacrifice of Christian in front of God and regarding his fellows.

In their conception, the Church has to manifest a great openness toward economics in general, recognising its consistency and values, but remaining faithful to herself and her mission.

In the end, I will justify the necessity to replace nowadays the standpoint of the Church Fathers regarding the economics with acuteness and finesse in the today Church's position facing the global economics and the financial crisis. A real hierarch, priest or theologian today cannot afford to isolate himself in an "ivory tower". On the contrary, he has to be permanently attentive to the evolutions and tendencies of the economy and of the financial system.

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