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ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, RELIGION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CRISIS

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Abstract: Ethical leadership is the best response in the crisis state of postmodern man. Ethical leadership is a construct that leads to personal transfiguration, organizational effectiveness, improved interpersonal communication, and the achievement of a joint platform for professional action. Its development has also a beneficial effect as it brings ethics back to the core of public action, to the front line of organizational life and personal development. Whether it follows a religious model or a model resulting from laicized religious values, leadership construing is based on a personal development process that follows an initiating structure in the world of values and their practice in personal ethical action. This is doubled by an ethics institutionalization process in which the organization itself becomes a structure of ethical and effective communication both inside and outside. An authentic leadership supposes positing the leader in the center of an ethical edifice in which achieving public good is done through instruments of personal development, ethics management and managerial ethics, ethical responsibility and sustainability, human condition improvement, spiritual transfiguration and authenticity. Added to this is the leader's personal effort of involvement in the organization. Ethical leadership relies on a person's vocation of developing an ethical culture in professional situations and in all life experiences.

Key Words: ethical leadership, personal development, religion, laicization, personal values, transhumanism, professional values, business ethics, managerial ethics, global crisis, religious model.

1. Leadership crisis and religious violence

There probably is no more current discussion than the one about leader crisis. In the Romanian public space, as well as worldwide, one talks about a leadership crisis. This feeds on a general perspective aiming at several crisis resources. Perhaps the most important of all is the one on the insecurity felt before successive waves of violence. As these occur in a network system, any possibility to set space limits to violence disappears. Particularly, the violence in religious communities, or that religiously motivated, has a special impact on the western world. Western society has experienced laicization with its positive effects at various levels of public life, including tolerance and eliminating violence based on religious principles and practices. One path to follow is to rethink the role of religious communities' leaders and the way communities think of themselves as promoters of their ideals in the context of rule of law and religious pluralism worldwide.

Western society helps overcome the crisis feeling by providing the framework of lay culture as a stage to assert religious diversity and religious freedom. The separation between state and church, religion and politics, the justice system and religion laws may add substance to a religious discourse integrated in the public debate that aims to solve spiritual problems rising in the religious community. Especially violence generating crises, or the ones diminishing the presence of violence need to be integrated in the tolerance discourse typical of religious communities. Interfaith and interreligious dialogue should be used as a common base to identity consolidation, faith and attitude clarification, and differentiation from dissident groups promoting religiously motivated violence. Such crises should not be solved on account of dogmas or utopian visions of faith. They may be solved only in a wider context of Western lay culture. In the cultural spaces beyond the Western one, where religious pluralism and multiculturalism are not construed, we ought to expect an increased role of religious communities in solving crises, especially in regard to the relation with the ecclesiastical, religious, ideological or cultural alterity. Religious community leaders should be the firm voice differentiating religious tradition from radical forms, from religious fundamentalism manifestations that may occur as a dissidence within the religion they represent. This way, in addition to the instruments that states have to control and eliminate violence, religious leadership should play a significant role in diminishing violence by cultivating tolerance and interreligious dialogue. Considering that Westernization is a major part of extremist groups' radical discourse, religious leadership should also act significantly to diminish tensions by manifesting a clear opening towards dialogue with the Western-type of lay culture and with the other cultures.

Against this general background of the global crisis appears the particular case of the savior mythology. Under the sign of a vulgarizing crisis philosophy, this mythology reveals an eschatological sense lacking any religious hope, following the idea that the present world can no longer generate a redeemer and neither can it enjoy the privilege of receiving a savior. Probably this best showcases the dynamic relationship between the ideological and the religious imaginary, with the interlap, recoil and revival manifested in late 20th century and early 21st century. Among others, we sense the prevailing preference for religious practices versus philosophical reflection, while applied ethics is part of this interplay of philosophy and ideology in contemporary man's life (Frunză et al. 2009, 129-149). This type of preference may be one of the reasons that make less evident the fact that in the contemporary world spiritual leadership crisis is a major source of religious violence.

Humanity today, more than any other time, seeks leaders that should keep together and balance wisdom, religion and ethics. Often religious ethics is associated with a kind of wisdom that founds and supports it. By use of such support, we get to equate wisdom to goodness and start pursuing it. Calling on certain classic spirituality views, Ajit Nayak shows that sometimes, leaders meet their objectives on achieving goodness by breaking some norms and privileging others. Such an ethical decision is made despite the fact that it supposes an association of wisdom to the idea of doing what is right, that a just way of achieving things is chosen and that action is taken to achieve common good (Nayak 2016, 1-13). It is one of the reasons that makes the discourse on the need to institute a global ethics is more up-to-date than ever (Swidler 2002; Küng 2006). Such ethics, however, may not be conceived of without accepting a general background of dialogue and spirituality for the development of global phenomena.

We have to accept that bringing spirituality into discussion poses the problem not only of the spirituality type but also of the level of its manifestation. Here we are interested only in the role pertaining to ethics and spirituality as regards leadership, in the managerial function and personal development. We leave aside the other valuable dimensions that we do not bring into our analysis. It is more important to understand the place that spirituality and ethics have in the promotion of a model based on the manager's role as a leader.

Relevant here is the distinction that Stephen R. Covey draws between personality ethics and character ethics. Firstly, the emphasis is on meeting the formal aspects of ethical behavior; secondly, it is about transforming the person who founds his/her success, other people's success and his/her organization's success on ethical structures such as: "*integrity*, humility, *fidelity*, temperance, *courage*, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, *modesty*" (Covey 2015, 6). This supposes not only to personally live in accordance with the fundamental values you believe in, but rather a per-

manent match between personal beliefs, personal life and ethical manifestation in professional relations. This faithfulness to personal values is associated by the author with the inherent spiritual dimension of a leadership ethics and of an ethical leader personality. Covey is convinced that the daily practice of prayer and meditation on biblical texts is the most important resource for regeneration and reinvigoration. However, he accepts that it differs substantially from person to person. Spiritual rebirth may base itself on literature, poetry, music, connection to nature, etc. (Covey 2015, 277).

A compelling distinction is made by Kelly A. Phipps between personal and collective spirituality. In the spirit of religious pluralism, we accept that both may be functional in a debate on leadership. It is obvious here, nevertheless, that personal spiritual beliefs are replete and should be correlated with a cultural model of a collectivity, organization, working group, etc. They have to be integrated into a strategy, a coherent hierarchy of values, and a certain model of organizational build and development (Phipps 2012, 177-189). Still, we can also talk about a profound level in which spirituality may be experienced, the one of individual spiritual options that suppose deepening knowledge and experience similarly to a series of mystical practices. Spiritual enrichment at the individual level may have positive effects on the environment in which the individual carries out his/her activity, even when it is independent from the type of knowledge and spiritual life attained (Semchuk 2015, 36-49). Irrespective of the type of approach, personal or community-oriented, we should assert the need to put to practice resources for harmony and dialogue that spiritualities have. Spirituality must be a field to assert all communication forms leading to the diminution or elimination of violence in general, and especial of religious violence. Ethical leadership may valorize the spiritual elements leading to violence elimination – be it about symbolical violence or a practice of violence through terrorist acts.

2. Leadership crisis, singularity, human condition and its fragility

From the viewpoint of ethical leadership it is significant that the spiritual dimension may become the organizing centre of personal transformation. Personal development through the ethical assumption of one's own internal life also triggers an ethical practice in public life. Emphasizing here the role of ethical leadership I do not mean to minimize the importance of other dimensions of leadership. For example, it is obvious that, in its turn, „Charismatic leadership behavior can attract excellent staff, inspire the cohesion and unity of subordinates, help staff reach agreement on personal and organizational goals, and improve organizational performance" (Yang and Zhu 2016, 179). All these are important in the context of our discussion as they support an ethical and

effective communication. What holds my attention is the fact that ethics as a part of human nature and cannot be absent from any of its genuine manifestations. Moreover, ethics may not be eluded even under circumstances in which we imagine humanity enter a new development stage, the supposed transhumanism, in which technology turns into a form of transcendence and human condition is removed from present patterns (Sandu 2015, 3-26; Chifflet 2016, 61-68). Such technologization of transcendence does not exclude a moral dimension associated to religious transcendence, it merely provides a new content to reflection and ethical practices.

These postmodern forms of transcending and transcendence should not feed contemporary human worries. They, nonetheless, cover a wide area. Among the prevailing elements of contemporary human anguish are: uncertainty about ensuring resources for the daily life or about economic transformation affecting living standards and the rapport to values. In the context of globalization, with the insufficiently generalized concern for sustainability policies, special care is given on account of the inconsistent measures for the environment and protection of the underprivileged population. No less anguish generates the attention to factors influencing public health and the ideological manipulation through the topic of diseases occurring seemingly beyond control. The suffering problem is growing all the more into an existential crisis and mistrust factor. In a world in which science promises that all human shortcomings shall be overcome and suffering eliminated, the individual is subject to maximum stress until he/she senses no control over his/her own suffering and death, its elimination upon request being possibly denied by public institutions, even when, for instance, euthanasia is requested in a terminal stage of disease (Frunză and Frunză 2013). The suffering issue brings back to discussion one's rapport to oneself, to the community, to labor market and entertainment, to the environment, cosmos and God itself.

Under pressure of postmodern speech about the post-Humanism stage, an important crisis resource is the ambiguity of the access to predictable organizations regarding technological development and its consequences upon a re-definition of human condition. We can note the existence of a syndrome related to *technological singularity* and the potentially unwanted consequences of artificial intelligence development upon human condition (Kurzweil 2006; Bostrom 2014). For the moment, we oscillate between a moderate optimism and a devastating pessimism as regards the human relation with his/her own technological creation. To date, it seems that neither philosophy nor theology have succeeded to provide pacifying responses to the prospects of a robotization of human beings or even of advantage that technological creation might have against the present authentic human condition.

One reason for optimism is the certainty that cars, robots, computers, gadgets, everything pertaining to artificial intelligence can only have as

much autonomy as human beings bestow on them. We are aware that human mind is behind every human creation. No matter how intelligent and sophisticated, in the end, the decision should always belong to a human being, endowed with responsibility and capacity for ethical decision. At the same time, one of the motivations of this crisis is that once technological creations have successfully replaced man in the labor process, we may fear they become so effective that they should be favored by man in expanded areas of human action.

A Western imaginary has developed which does not exclude the version that they might fill in for man. This type of fears is based on a secularized view on work. Even if we are at the stage that man's cohabitation with creations based on artificial intelligence has become integrated to the sacred in the views of some religious movements (Chryssides and Wilkins 2006), work is generally perceived as an activity occurring for profane reasons and finalities. Our world is dominated by a lay vision that separates work from its sacredness and thus, also, work's ultimate significance, the one linked to the very condition of human being in the world. In contemporary spirituality analyses we have research revealing the need for the spiritual significance of work. This involves the postmodern nostalgia of regaining authenticity by valorizing all human virtualities. A dimension to be recovered is the one that reconnects man with nature, with cosmos, integrating work into a structure of human interaction modes with nature, with life, with oneself. This need to spiritualize work that postmodern man feels was emphasized by postmodern research both in the lay and in the religious literature, and in monotheist thinking, as well as in other religious systems of thought (Peregoy 2016, 271-287).

3. Ethical leadership and professional values

It is a good reminder the fact that more and more, the descriptions in motivational literature reveal the need to assume at least one minimal level of association between leadership, managerial efficiency and sustainable development. This way, we may find that the discussion on leadership should start from at least the conviction that „Leadership reflects the manager's human dimension which may determine the group to work together to fulfill the organizational goals. Organizations have started to shift towards a new type of leader, a charismatic, transformational, open to change and interpersonal communication type of leader. In order to maintain an up-to-date vision, a leader should make sense of his/her organization, respect and take care of his/her employees. He or she should promote a set of transparent values and show integrity" (Păuş 2016, 148). Therefore, institutional communication, interpersonal communication, the practice of a value-based behavior the development

of a culture of trust and integrity are part of the elements of a care ethics assumed by the person recognized to be a leader.

What is valuable on a personal level is not only correlated to what is desirable institutionally but also has positive effects as regards achieving a type of leadership to be perceived as authentic. This way, the leader exerts a larger influence upon his/her group. It has been noticed that once the group is convinced the leader works for the collective interest and carries their message and values, the leader's capacity to mobilize himself/herself increases. The leader's model functions then like an inspirational model to the extent that the group or the community perceive him/her as identifying with the group and with the group's interests and aspirations. The leadership authentic character is thus more visible in the group's perception (Steffens et al. 2016, 726-744). We should not ignore, however, the fact that perception supposes a certain relativity, typical actually to postmodern mentalities. They should not lead us to a form of relativism in which plurality of interpretations means "there are no facts, only interpretations" (Bondor 2016, 5-14). Relativity of personal perception is always corrected by organizational reality. We may mention here the theorization indicating a close connection between institutions' ethical culture and the individual and organizational ethical behavior. The leader has a fundamental role in creating a better coherence between the individual and the institutional. The more those in leading positions prove motivated, the more their subordinates are motivated. When they assume an ethical behavior, individuals are more capable to develop personally, to develop their critical spirit, to notice and report shortcomings that may occur; there is a bigger ethical concern to identify solutions; there is a bigger desire to participate in the construction of an organization's ethical culture (Wright et al. 2016, 647-663).

An ethical leadership will always be concerned with construing and consolidating an ethical infrastructure. As important as it is to assume deontological principles and to a greater extent than virtue ethics, organizational ethics is set to motion and made effective through a series of formal and informal instruments, through a leadership style and other organizational culture elements, all seen as elements of an ethical culture. In a set of interviews on ethics institutionalization conducted by Jose Luis Fernandez and Javier Camacho with managers of small and medium organizations, the conclusion they reached was that leadership and communication are indispensable elements in the construction of an ethical infrastructure. Once the instruments of organizational ethics are construed, leadership and communication are decisive elements to achieve, implement, streamline sustainable ethical infrastructure (Luis Fernandez and Camacho 2016, 113-131).

In the discussion on leadership, we note a turn from business ethics, understood simply as development of an ethical business behavior, to the creation of an institutional culture in which leadership ethics intertwines

with organization ethics management. This phenomenon was highlighted by Antonio Sandu who talked about the need for a turn from business ethics to ethical leadership. He insisted on the need to turn from stating principles to govern business relations to an ethical conduct in which the axiological model assumed by the manager should be central (Sandu 2016, 172). Such a model is founded on the role that the manager has as a leader.

This is not only about managers assuming values but also about a personal development process in which values become part of their ethical being, a mode of moral practice in personal and in organizational life. The personal development process is supposed to be part of the creation of close connections between assuming values and their practical occurrence in the context of ethical action in organizations.

Against this background we note the existence of a general discourse on crisis, part of which are the ideas related to the need for change among public figures. In the public sphere, most visible are the expectations of political leaders and their capacity to give themselves to public good. Political conduct descriptions denote politicians' and public figures' tendency to behave according to a stereotype dictated by expectations in the cultural space in which they are present (Bourdieu 1986; Schwartzenberg 1995). Conforming to stereotypes does not lead to model accumulation but rather to eroding the idea of model. When there is a claim that models worth following are few, what is meant is standardization and lack of differentiating features. The model is not important for the fact that it sums up features typical of a desirable stereotype construct but rather for what differentiates, for the creative dimension it denotes in an exemplary way. Thus, „Creativity is a crucial factor that has the potential of not only tackling such challenges but it also serves as a leading force for knowledge development and uplifting the social and economic development" (Ahmad et al. 2015, 6). Lack of creativity in the political behavior and decision may be a resource in the political leadership crisis. One of the solutions to overcome a crisis would be to stimulate the presence in the public space of personalities that can come out of expectation patterns in the common behavior. The leader is the response to the need for development and transformation felt in daily life, and has the merit to bring an exceptional state into the daily routine. He should play the part that fits the need for change, for highlighting strong features, claiming characteristics beyond patterns and manifested as if it belonged to the exceptional people category. At the same time, the leader should manifest a natural conduct, lacking artificiality. He/she integrates into a construction meant to stir the trust to be assumed by any community member, into a singular conduct that may become desirable to any community member. Leader representation as manifestation of decency, generalized respect and empathic appropriation of community values is part of exceptional manifestation brought about by the leader position.

Exceeding patterns, abandoning stereotype behavior, augmenting the presence of ethics are elements that the individual can develop as personal virtues put to community service. Even if choices are not based on virtue ethics, ethics becomes a virtue that transfigures the individual.

Not accidentally, recent research indicates that the theory of virtue ethics is applicable to business environment analysis. Such view is focused on the importance of character, morality, transformative influence of individuals who practice virtue ethics. Beyond rules and norms set by professional deontology, we cannot ignore the fact that individuals as moral agents are the ones who secure an ethical climate in organizations. It is true that personal principles are in this case always subordinated to professional ethics. When personal values are in conflict with cu those of the profession or of the organization, personal values get priority in interpersonal work relations. But, at the same time, human being assuming a virtue ethics always manifests like a consciousness, like an ethical intervention factor in the life of individuals and of the group with which the individual connects. Thus, we note that excellence in society and in business is often the result of the action of persons having a strong morality that impacts their rapport to problem solving and solution implementation (Wang et al. 2016, 67-77).

In a world in which communication is granted a central role in the entire existence, the whole meaning construction is achieved in its plane, be it about transmitting motivational messages or other constructions regarding wishes and aspirations that make humanity develop on the way to its authenticity (Vlăduțescu 2013, 212-218; Frunză 2011, 140-152). Cultural tradition shows us that one of the important forces acting as a resource in message construction, awareness and meaning was religious community. We can see data highlighted by communication analysis in premodern societies, as we note the impact of communities and religious institutions in modern times. Even in the Romanian context, researchers have pointed out that in the modernization of Romania, „ecclesiastical publications assisted the higher clergy and the parish priests to be not only spiritual shepherds of their communities, but also counselors guiding the believers in their everyday lives. Villagers turned to the priests when they wanted to receive counsel on the economic, social or cultural decisions they had to make" (Bolovan 2016, 148).

Spiritual dimension, virtue ethics and religious wisdom can still feed today the need for personal development and the image construction of leaders. Even so, we are at a stage in which the postmodern leader stresses the professional values in the ethical construction of his/her action. Such an attitude does not contradict a religious perspective of leadership, like the one expressed in a part of papers by John C. Maxwell, one of the most significant authors and trainers in personal development and leadership. In a few of his works, he states that the leadership foundation is theological. It may develop on religious or lay bases. But the exemplary

model of the leader is to John C. Maxwell, God himself, who created the world and leads with his power the entire existence. What differentiates an ordinary leader from a leader assuming a spiritual leadership mode is found by Maxwell in 1John 4:7-21 and is motivated by love for God and for man. When he states that „We all lead and are led by someone", he has in view a very clear the image of a leader with all the attributes we find in the biblical teachings. This is how we understand the moral power of his statement: „Character and competence make a leader be trustful" (Maxwell 2007, 3). Competence has become part of professional values without which professional excellence may not be conceived. It may be integrated into the triad: knowledge, ethical engagement and faith. Such a platform to seek authenticity may be found in many reflections in useful books drawing action and personal development. Guidance on how to seek and cultivate authenticity is to be found in John C. Maxwell's reflections. Talking about 21 qualities of a leader, he starts with character, includes among others charisma, competence, generosity, responsibility, vision. Leadership is built on the way to strength of character and permanent action following a vision always to integrate the others and include God (Maxwell 2003, 151).

4. Conclusions

Whether they explicitly include God or not, personal development and leadership programs have an initiating structure inspired from the religious type of initiation. Very many of Christianity values and of other spiritualities are present in these programs and discourse that propose a person restoration and a maximal development of the individual in his professional community. Although we most often have a laicized version of discourse, its deep structure still keeps the positive energy of the initial sacredness. The authenticity of the human development is in no way diminished by the fact that the growth process is achieved not on religious moral bases but on deontology or other forms of lay ethics.

In the present text, I had in mind the fact that we often say in the western world that crisis drives are of a moral nature. As a solution to diminish crisis, I wished to closely connect personal development, ethical leadership and managerial effectiveness. The existence of a managerial structure that acts in the form of ethical leadership at organizational level will have a positive effect upon all the other levels of hierarchical decision-making. Current research in leadership show that an authentic thinking promoted at the top has consequences at department level, team level to the level of authentic relationships between individuals. Outside this influence there is no personal plan, nor ethical interrogation of the individual about his/her own person (Hirst et al. 2016). It is to be expected that such a behavior should extend to business partners and positively affect various public categories that the organization serves.

The fact that we privilege managerial ethics, personal development and leadership does not mean at all an undervaluation of the importance of business ethics. To invoke and practice ethical principles is crucial in organizational life, be it about good practice at the workplace, relations with stakeholders, with society or with the environment, be it about attributing rewards or holding responsible. However, in the present situation, emphasis is on the fundamental role of the individual in a personal ethical engagement, based on specific deontology in the sector in which he/she operates. Ethical leadership supposes ethical leaders capable to secure an ethical climate as regards respect in the workplace, respect for human dignity, rules and legislation governing the professional field of activity. As part of the ethical action, the problem of recognizing work value and its reward through legal means available is part of a good organizational culture (Wang and Yang 2016; Dobre-Baron and Nițescu 2016). Work reward should include among professional results the efforts for personal development, the contribution to the development of others, the participation to the welfare of the community, and positive action in the spirit of social responsibility. It may be one of the solutions that are part of a complex of ethical action aimed to diminish existential anguish of postmodern man.

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