

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ETHICAL VALUES, THE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE, AND HUMAN COMMUNITIES, ACCORDING TO VASILE GOLDIȘ

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Abstract. The author presents the views held by Vasile Goldiș – Transylvanian scholar, politician, and one of the masterminds of the Great Union of 1 December 1918 – regarding the role of universal human values in guiding individuals and human communities. Together with other Christian values, ethics guides individuals, communities, political and administrative elites, churches, and academia. This results in greater justice, community solidarity and cohesion, and a greater ability for society to shape and promote its internal moral order. Considering the diversity of moral profiles found among various nations, ethnicities and political elites, Goldiș highlights their common grounds – which facilitates a new moral order in inter-human, inter-community and international relations. The ethical testament promoted by Goldiș in his writings and throughout his life is still relevant today, and it also holds true for the next generations.

Keywords. Moral values, meaning of life, political ethics, Goldiș, Christian solidarity.

1. Introduction

Beginning in high school and more so during his university years, Vasile Goldiș questioned the meaning of human struggles on Earth, and the path to be followed by human communities. Thus, in his early diary he noted his reflections on the meaning of human existence, the ethical principles on which it should be based and, above all, he emphasised the need to place interpersonal relations on the principle of solidarity arising from Jesus Christ's urge to "love thy neighbour". By the end of his life, aware of the proximity of death, Vasile Goldiș assessed his own life in ethical terms: "I am content and serene, as I can hear my conscience whispering to me that I did not live in vain and I did all the good I could do." [1]

Ethical issues and the solutions he ascribed to them hold a privileged place in the view of Vasile Goldiș on individuals and society; traditional ethical concepts – good and evil, Christian love, solidarity, happiness, freedom, responsibility, virtue, duty, moral ideal, moral code, perfection of character and spiritual life etc. are vastly featured in his essays, reviews, and speeches. Adding to these are profound approaches to the relationship between the freedom of an individual and his/her community values, as seen in the light of duty and natural human rights, as grounds for moral conduct [2]. A greater emphasis is placed on writings concerning ethical

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values driving human communities, political and administrative ethics, the ethics of clerical hierarchy, or ethnical morality, an individual's character and moral ideal, or on analyses of moral conduct in people's relations with the social structures to which they belong.

2. The role of ethical ideals and moral values in the lives of individuals and communities

Vasile Goldiș believed that the value of a person was not given by their knowledge, however vast, but by the morals guiding their lives, their ideals, and their character, urging them to continuous and gradual self-improvement. Morals are the norm of our behaviour in relation to our neighbours. A secular dictum on morality might as well be "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Nevertheless, the grounds for morals lie in Christian teachings – the supreme ideal of life. In this regard, Goldiș asked this rhetorical question: "Where will you find more generous, more enlightening, more beatific moral precepts than in our *Saviour's Sermon on the Mountain*? And which democracy would be more accomplished than the one professed by the gentle Jesus?" [3] A spirit of initiative, a healthy judgement, a firm, action-oriented will, relentless and fruitful work, and the love for one's neighbour are the criteria for character in an individual. "Nothing can stand against will and perseverance", Goldiș wrote. Psychologists know that willpower can even triumph over pain. Characters provide security in any human society. History can testify that nations disappear when their character, rather than their intelligence, is weakened" [4]. Gustave le Bon's (1841-1931) influence on Goldiș' view on the psychology of individuals and communities is quite obvious [5].

If, at an individual level, the ideal of life has Promethean functions, and the development of strong and healthy individual characters is a prerequisite for progress in human civilisations and societies (Vasile Goldiș continues his reasoning by transferring to the scale of human communities), then the moral values are those that shape the stock of solidarity among people, and a nation's level of morality marks its place on the scale of civilisation, establishing its life power, greatness and glory.

In this conceptual framework, Goldiș confessed his personal beliefs on the meaning of human society, and professed his faith: "I confess that I believe mankind's supreme purpose is to create situations where the individual feels happy to be alive, and joyful, ready at any moment to sacrifice anything for those conditions which he believes grants him and his kind that joy of living" [6]. We can succeed in this endeavour by strengthening our souls, by achieving spiritual accomplishment in individuals and nations, by internalising the values of love for one's neighbour, justice, good, and freedom. For instance, the absolute freedom of life and of all its expression is the sun ripening the happiness of mankind. Strengthening characters

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by assimilating the values of humanity will lead to people getting closer to each other, to the consolidation of social solidarity [7] as the source of power and glory for human collectives.

In this context, we can observe the influences of the Durkheim School of Sociology on Goldiș' thinking, exerted by some of the School's outstanding representatives, such as Célestin Bouglé (1870-1940). They believed that the essence of a society was the community of feelings, and that the civilisation consisted of a system of undertaken goals that would lay the groundwork for solidarity among people and the unitary coordination of individual activities [8].

Vasile Goldiș took the example of his ancestors, performing moral assessments according to their actions, and the extent to which their ideals of life and work were concretised into perennial values of civilisation. With this idea in mind, he wrote: "Blessed be their ashes in their holy graves and forever may they be remembered. They were our fathers, who never lost hope in their boundless love for their kind, and who never looked down to be terrified by the dirt of this finite life, but vigorously peered into passionless horizons, and into the eternal future of our kind ... for their hearts were big, and their passions small, and they loved their kind above all hatred they might have had amongst themselves. Man's life has an ending, but good deeds live forever. And our soul bathes in the river of joy when, looking to the past, we see our ancestors' wondrous deeds." [9] The purpose of their lives was the welfare of the nation, for which they strove full-heartedly, and not the transient feasting, nor the race for honours, presidencies, titles, or fortunes.

Vasile Goldiș promoted a militant ethics, aiming to spread kindness and love of nation, to learn the lessons taught by our ancestors, to understand the sins of evil men in order to avoid them in the future. This, along with the actions of schools, churches, theatres and other formative institutions, was intended to elevate individual characters, to foster superior ideals, to cultivate soul-strengthening virtues. A person's moral superiority can be established in relation to these characteristics of the soul. Goldiș considered that "It is these spiritual characteristics that make a distinguished person, and not a black moustache, or thin, long fingers. At least morally speaking..." [10] Conversely, dry souls, lacking willpower and ideals, wander through life without tasting its sweetness and are unable to bear fruit. This is also how some nations can live on the face of the Earth. Moreover, a person's superiority in relation to those of their kind is highlighted by their worthiness, their work – better appreciated by their community than the work of others, by having better morals than others and by rising in their society through their devotion to its advancement.

In its turn, a just and moral society would encourage useful labour, and this labour will be the measure of individual happiness, each person being able to make themselves happy to the extent of the work they performed for community welfare.

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Thus, the chance of an individual to achieve their ideal in life is viewed by Vasile Goldiș in close connection with the prosperity of their community, the degree of cohesion in that society, and with the strength of human solidarity – as grounds for individuals succeeding in those actions where, as singular beings, they could not achieve the desired success. Goldiș was convinced that “everyone belongs to a nation, and the fate of each man is bound to that of his nation... each individual forges his own welfare to the extent where his strengths contribute to the foundation of common welfare, and the efforts of each individual are rewarded in relation to the general situation of his nation!” [11]

3. Ethics applied to political life

According to the principles of his ethical doctrine, Vasile Goldiș critically detached himself from both the morals promoted by socialist and communist parties active in Europe at the time, and materialistic ideas. Taking post-WWI events in Russia and Hungary as examples, Goldiș envisioned the possibility of artificial and unjust levelling of moral behaviours in Communist societies, wiping out of the distinction between an honest person and a vile rascal, and denying Christian human dignity. Goldiș believed that promoting such Communist ethics would mean the end of our kind, our human meaning and dignity; it would mean the destruction of all that is noble and Godly in the world. [12]

Goldiș ascribed a similar position to the materialistic outlook of history – Marx’s ethical vision – setting ultimate, final moral values to be reached by the prevalent use of material means. He believed that the progress of individuals and nations was infinite, as was the path to one’s own spiritual accomplishment. “Since any human progress is made in the society and since society is a mental, rather than material construct, the doctrine of historical materialism is soon to be sent to the museum of dead hypotheses”. [13]

Goldiș lived, thought and worked as a political leader and as high official in state structures [14] without compromising his ethical beliefs and his moral principles. From this position he actively promoted a new political ethics in the State structures of both the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and, subsequently, Greater Romania, achieved by the historical Act on 1 December 1918, in Alba Iulia. [15]

After the failure of the memorandum movement, Goldiș became aware of how important it was for Romanians to abandon passivity regarding the operation of Imperial State bodies and the decisions of authorities, as declared representatives of only the Hungarian nationality. He thus re-evaluated the social mentality and moral qualities of the Romanian people in the Transylvanian area – such as the patient attitude, the longing for social and national justice, the temperance or moderation favouring the passage to the resolute action of changing struggle tactics by replacing passivity with active participation in political activity, including in

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Parliament. In this context, the path that could lead to salvation would entail a new political ethics relying on trust in the good faith of fellows from the organisation, on discussing issues with real and logical reasons, on the complete abandonment of personal moments and on replacing personal insinuations and suspicion with true moral principles. Goldiș thought that the justification for our emancipation actions, to obtain salvation through ourselves, was given by our inner character, by the living strength of our souls which fortify themselves from the spring of love for nation and people, from the fruit of our endeavours.

On the eve of the act of 1 December 1918 in Alba Iulia, as foreseer and mentor of the great political renewal that would liberate the bodies and souls of Romanians and other people of the same political condition, Vasile Goldiș formulated the "Political Credo" of Romanians everywhere. This political credo had Promethean and ethical connotations, targeting inter-ethnic relations between nations and states, and respect for the natural and inalienable rights of nations. The political ethics of Goldiș – as founder of the Romanian national state – is stated clearly as follows: "United, thus, in one mind and one will, we shall all coalesce around the Romanian National Committee, and with our joint powers we shall cooperate in achieving this credo. Let all differences among us perish, and let us submit our personal interests to the common interest. Let the zeitgeist inspire us to action and virtue for the glory, welfare and eternal happiness of our nation. Let any kind of intrigue, mystification and malevolent insinuation against the leadership fall away from our conduct, so as to make it worthy of our past and appropriate to the historical progress and the major events we are living." [16]

Political ethics, as inferred from the above, in particular the tireless efforts for the welfare and eternal happiness of the Romanian people, for promoting those virtues that would generate the eternal glory of nations, were the guiding lines of Goldiș' life and deeds until the time of his death. [17] As party leader, Member of Parliament or minister, he went on expressing the same attitudes and promoting the same political values, imposing the same moral precepts on the governments in Bucharest, contained within the new State structures established by the act of the Great Union of 1 December 1918, as he did previously within institutions of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In this regard, various interventions and analyses made by Goldiș, including in sessions of the Romanian Parliament, were aimed at highlighting ethical political values, and ways designed to install a new moral order in the political and administrative life, in the decision-making bodies of the Romanian State, and in social life. The unified Romanian national State could not be consolidated unless freedom and justice were to reign over to all its citizens, regardless of whether they were Romanians or of any other nationality or religion.

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Vasile Goldiș expressed his disagreement with those political currents or parliamentary groups that supported the oppression of cohabitating nationalities by not allowing elementary education in their native language, or by justifying acts of chauvinism. He believed that vengeance against Hungarian ethnics had no place in our thoughts and behaviour. Such a sentiment would be no less than a denial of the spirit of the Romanian nation. A people's psychology is vitiated in its sense of dignity, justice and equity, so long as it promotes the enslavement of another nation. A nation that enslaves another nation is not truly free. This is how Vasile Goldiș thought, detaching himself from petty passions or interests, and aiming for the height of a universal political ethics, placed above the deeds and behaviours of people with vested interests, be they state officials.

To the question: "How can we more easily win over the soul of our minorities?" he gave a simple and straightforward answer: "Through justice and kindness." [18] With regard to the ethics of public administration officials and State representatives, Vasile Goldiș' requirement was: "Do not Balkanise us!" It appears that such an urge has close connotations to those resulting from the state politics and public administration developed by the Romanian state during previous decades.

4. A new moral order in international relations

After the First World War, the history of Europe took a new turn, generating great transformations, among which was a moral reform, bringing about a new moral order of humanity. Vasile Goldiș was sure that the new order of inter-human and international relations was based on the principle of "love for one's neighbour", on human solidarity ranging from micro-groups to planetary social and political macro-systems, that is, from Christian spirituality. Goldiș wrote, "The belief in God and in Christian morals shall be the first two pillars on which to build Greater Romania. The new Romanian state should be devoted to the principle of work as measure for moral values". [19] However, above all, if we were to follow the path that led to accomplishment and spiritual progress, then honesty, impartiality, and sacred altruism should reign over all those who receive upon them the burdening righteousness and the beautiful duty of conducting community affairs.

In terms of international relations, Goldiș intuited and analysed the evolution of universal society and its constituent nations, based on the rationalisation of labour, on a new stage in the development of civilisation, allowing all individuals, including those who were poor and humble, to have access to the beauties of the world, life, thought and artistic creation. In this evolving framework, Goldiș paints an admiring picture of the qualities of the Romanian people regarding solidarity, universal peace, and respect for diversity, resulting from Christian spirituality and from practicing the ethical model of Jesus Christ. Goldiș appreciated the "endeavour of the Romanian nation for eternal peace and its association to the

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work of universal solidarity in the struggle for more justice and freedom in the world of man". [20] In essence, the fundamental values which should guide the progress of world order are peace, solidarity among individuals and nations, justice, freedom, and the reign of truth.

Sharing the ethical Christian credo and ideal, as well as those moral values which sparked the process of forging the spiritual unity of all people and in the name of which, for the first time in history, diversity, equality, freedom and fraternity, comforting the weak and sentencing the vile and treacherous were proclaimed, Vasile Goldiș addressed the next generations with words bearing the significance of a moral testament: "Oh, you, who step on our steps, keep faithful watch at this doorstep, listen to the voice of the new times, begin your century by reinstating faith, hard work, honesty and mercy in your thoughts and souls, have love for truth, justice, and freedom, and make it so that, in a hundred years, we should bless your deeds from our graves, and the nation would shine in its virtue at the shore of the Black Sea, between the Dniester, the Tisa and the blue Danube." [21]

At the end of this study, we can agree with the objective assessment of Professor Vasile Popeangă, according to whom, after the Great Union, Vasile Goldiș "stood more and more as a Christian-democrat thinker who laid Christian virtues at the basis of processes driving social transformation. He believed that social progress is achieved by perfecting inter-human relations, due to the predominance of the spirit of justice, honest labour and religiosity which ennoble the conscience." [22] At the same time, we underline that the moral order of inter-individual relations, with its regulating values of Christian origin, was extrapolated by Goldiș at a macro-social level, going up to the scope of international relations and the establishment of European and planetary institutions, resulting, historically speaking, in great renewals for human civilisation, designed to bring more joy and satisfaction to individuals. [23]

Goldiș was familiar with contemporary trends in sociology, political philosophy, anthropology, geopolitics, and with the trend in political thinking that a new world order based on economic, legal and ethical grounds would be needed to eliminate war, and bloody conflicts in general. Humanity needed new worldwide institutions to manage international relations based on solidarity and cooperation between nations and their states. This developed into such ideas as the "free nations society", the "league of nations", the concept of a "universal State" to represent and defend the interests of all its constituting parties. In such a framework, Goldiș was influenced by the works of the great English philosopher and scientist (and Nobel Prize laureate) Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) [24]. Goldiș was also influenced by other renowned authors from France, Germany, Great Britain, Austria, etc. in defining his own view on mankind's progress and the evolution of international political institutions, so that disasters such as those caused by the First

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World War would be avoided. He quotes the English author, Herbert George Wells (1866-1946), who launched a theory on a future "worldwide State" (a Super-State) and designed a plan on how the worldwide Government should be formed [25]. Being well aware of the economic, social and political situation, and of the main trends in political ideas during the inter-war period, Goldiș formed his own vision on the establishment of a worldwide society and civilisation, relying on justice, the guarantee of peace, and human rights. The need to guide mankind to a worldwide structure opens up a new stage in history and the fulfilment of human ideals. The new political organisation of mankind – "the universal State" reflects the evolution of the human spirit, which lays the basis for worldwide solidarity among individuals and nations. The remedy against wars would be "the universal State". The historical evolution in this direction is no longer a utopia, as there is a way of achieving the new world order which excludes force; it is the spiritual path, which promotes general human values, justice, solidarity, equality, the perfect enlightenment of individuals and masses, having universal welfare at its core [26]. The achievement of a universal State is a gradual and long-lasting historical process, which would not be the end point of history. On the contrary, in Goldiș' opinion, this new international organisation would give rise to new issues, and the perfectibility of the human spirit is infinite, resulting in new future stages for the historical evolution of society.

5. Conclusions

His ethical credo, the moral doctrine he professed, his thinking and his Promethean deeds situate Vasile Goldiș within an apostolic or heroic typology. His theoretical constructions in the field of political ethics, his contributions to the ethics of interethnic and international relations, as well as his vision on the new virtual moral order of Europe and the Earth, pertain to the personal example he set and demonstrated throughout his life, but they remain far from the "prose of thought" and the behaviour of crowds, and even from the interests and orientations of several educated people with high positions in society.

Therefore, throughout his lifetime, as a human individual, as a consistorial secretary, and as a brilliant politician, Vasile Goldiș was inspired and guided by the ethical Christian model provided by Jesus Christ, adjusting his activity and life in accordance with the principle of solidarity. His philosophical analyses conceptualise, in various stances, the moral fate of individuals, communities, and especially nations, resulting in original contributions that are worthy of being considered as useful teachings in the study of ethics, particularly as applied to political elites, ethnicities, public administration, clerical hierarchy and didactics.

The ethical message promoted by Vasile Goldiș, both in his theoretical endeavours and in practical life, remains true for the young generations of today, as well as for

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future ones. As Ion Clopoșel noted, Vasile Goldiș, as one of the European political leaders and thinkers of his times, left us with a substantial body of work in theoretical, ethical and practical philosophy, which is still of interest to national and international experts. [27]

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