

SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The present interdisciplinary study aims to analyse solidarity and social cohesion in the Christian-Orthodox informational context. The research uses the analysis of theological literature on this topic and studies in the field of social psychology. We have also used the data obtained as a result of several qualitative research surveys carried out in 2020 and 2021 by the Center of Sociology and Social Psychology of the Institute of Legal, Political and Sociological Research. Using data from a 2021 survey, we studied how the frequency of prayer associates and correlates with prosocial acts, social activism, and social participation. Among the more important conclusions of the study, we can mention the following: more frequent contact with the contents of faith is associated with solidarity behaviour; exposure to prosocial models influences and increases the likelihood of human helping; those who pray more frequently self-report a higher level of social activism and participation in social life. A possible role of the mass media in this context is discussed.

Keywords: Solidarity, mutual help, Christianity, prayer, media

1 INTRODUCTION

The culture and history of the population of the Republic of Moldova are closely related to Christianity and Christian values, which influence all spheres of people's daily life. For many years, in all surveys, the Church appears with the highest level of trust from the population. At the same time, not all of the population that identifies as belonging to the Christian-Orthodox cult is equally active from a religious point of view. Some Christians are more versed in knowing the contents of the faith they profess, and others less so. There are many who go to church only in certain more important moments of their lives.

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In the present study, we set out to see to what extent solidarity and mutual help are characteristic of Christianity and the practical life of a Christian. And if they become stronger according to how the person is more strongly attached and more active in practicing the faith.

It would be complicated to give a single definition to the term solidarity. The idea of social solidarity, very popular in sociological discourse, was historically developed from the idea of Christian charity (mercifulness). Having a religious character at first, it began to be widely used in the secular space as well [1, p. 4].

According to Emile Durkheim's theory, the social function of religion is to be a source of solidarity for the members of a community. Thus, the basis of solidarity would be a system of collective representations, and the mechanisms for producing solidarity are the actions according to common rules, such as religious rituals [2, p. 67-68]. Trying to look more broadly and update Durkheim's theory to our times, P. V. Batanova highlights the fact that religious beliefs are some representations of the nature of the sacred and the nature of the relationship between the sacred and the profane. The collective representations regarding what is sacred and what is not, as well as the models of behaviour to be adopted in relation to what is sacred would, in fact, be the basis of solidarity between people [2, p. 67-71].

Solidarity between people can be seen as an aspect of spirituality because it involves a relationship and is linked to some values and visions of existence. Solidarity transcends the sphere of individualism, which is private, and connects us to others [3, p. 192].

Although the term "solidarity" is a more recent one, compared to the age of Christianity, the idea is very present in the Christian Church. In theological language, the term "communion" (in Greek "koinonia") is used more often, which has several meanings and contains the idea of solidarity [4, p. 95].

For the life of a Christian, it is important to move from orthodoxy, the right confession and glorification of God, to orthopraxy, to the service of the neighbour and the world. There is an inseparable connection between personal spirituality and *diakonia* (understood as service to one's neighbour) [4, p. 279-280].

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For a Christian, the supreme model of love and self-giving for one's neighbour is the person of Christ [5]. Jesus Christ summarizes the entire message of the Old Testament in two basic commandments, noting that in these two "comprises all the Law and the Prophets". These are: "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, to love your neighbour as yourself" [6, p. 77].

There are several ways to measure religious activism. For example, how often people attend places of worship or how often they attend religious services. In the present study, we chose to inquire about how often Christians pray. The frequency of prayer speaks about how much the person is attached to the faith he has and how much he tries to put into practice the values it conveys.

Gabriel Bunge, hieromonk and research theologian, states in his work dedicated to the practice of personal prayer that the prayer is a kind of "barometer of the intensity of faith" [7, p. 227].

Not every kind of prayer has the same quality, it matters a lot in what way it is performed, in what state the person is, what kind of behaviour the person adopts. Prayer must be done "with faith, perseverance, fasting and almsgiving" [8, p. 448-449]. The latter would mean that the prayer should be completed with the "good deed" [9, p. 32].

If we try to approach the theme of solidarity and mutual helping from a psychosocial perspective, then the most appropriate and closest term that would cover their meaning would be that of prosocial behaviour.

According to Septimiu Chelcea, prosocial is an "intentional behaviour, carried out outside of professional obligations and oriented towards supporting, preserving and promoting social values". It must be realized consciously and the presence of the intention to support social values is mandatory [10, p. 445].

In Lindeberg's view, prosocial behaviour is an intentional behaviour that bring benefits to others (not necessarily without self-interest) that involves a sacrifice from the part of the one who adopts it. Lindenberg mentions that there are at least five forms of prosocial behaviour: cooperation, fairness, altruism, trustworthiness (refraining from breaking promises), and being considerate [11].

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Experimental results (J.H. Bryan and N.H. Walek, 1970) show that observing a prosocial model of behaviour increases the likelihood of helping. This fact demonstrates that exposure to prosocial models increases the likelihood of human helping [10, p. 447-457].

In this context, an interesting topic is that of moral emotions. They refer to affective reactions to events and situations that do not directly affect the person. They are affective reactions related to the interests or well-being of society in general or of people other than the one who feels and experiences them [12, p. 79].

Moral elevation is a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they witness unexpected acts of kindness and compassion. According to Diessner, it is an emotional reaction to unexpected contact with instances of moral beauty [12, p. 77]. It causes the person who feels it to help others and become a better person [13].

Research results show that "moral elevation induces a more positive perspective on the character of people in general, a kind of optimism regarding the fundamental features of the human race" [12, p. 82].

Love and desire for affiliation seem to be a common response for people who witness holy deeds or watch the behaviour of a saint, or even hear about their deeds. If disgust is a negative emotion that strengthens the boundaries of the ego and defends against what is morally reprehensible, elevation is a desire to associate with those who are morally admirable [13].

A. Holman and L. Gherasim show that moral elevation could create a multiplying effect of prosocial acts. A prosocial behaviour motivated by moral elevation induced from observing a situation, can, in turn, induce moral elevation in other observers [12, p. 86]. Here we can note that the environment of a Christian religious community could be the most suitable one to generate such behaviours inspired by others and which in turn inspire others.

2 METHODOLOGY

In the present study, we used the data obtained in a survey carried out by the Center of Sociology and Social Psychology of the Institute of Legal, Political

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and Sociological Research of the State University of Moldova, between November 15 and December 20, 2021, on a sample of 1698 people.

The questionnaire included the question "How often do you pray?". The frequency of prayer was used as the independent variable. From the sample, were selected those who declared themselves as Orthodox Christians, a total of 1525 persons (89.8% of the entire sample). They were placed in three groups according to the frequency with which they pray: Every day (226 participants, 14.8% of those declared Orthodox), Often (474 participants, 31.1% of those declared Orthodox), Sometimes/ Not at all (813 participants, 53.3% of those declared Orthodox). In the tables describing the results, there is also a row for the entire sample, which refers to the result obtained for all 1698 subjects, including non-Christians.

Since mutual aid involves being in the position of the one giving help and at the same time being in the position of the one receiving the help, we tried to analyse both aspects. In this sense, from the questionnaire used in the quantitative research, we selected several relevant items that we grouped into two subsections: willingness to give help and participation; trust in people.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Willingness to help and participate

3.1.1 Frequency of prayer and willingness to help in various situations

The questionnaire used for the research included some questions in which the respondents had to evaluate how they would react if they found themselves in a situation where someone needed help, support or defense. A total of four situations were described: a person mocked/mistreated on public transport; an elderly person alone in the street on a very frosty night; a Roma person is verbally abused in a store; someone mistreats an animal in the park/street. Respondents had 3 answer options: "I wouldn't do anything", "I would call the police or social assistance", "I would support him directly". We analysed the responses based on the frequency with which the study participants pray. For each situation we applied the Chi-Square Test of Association to see if there were statistically significant associations in the distribution of results by frequency of prayer. Each time we obtained significant results, $p < 0.001$.

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A first situation referred to how the respondent would react if they saw a person mocked/mistreated in public transport.

Table 1. Willingness to help a mocked/mistreated person in public transport, depending on the frequency of prayer.

	I wouldn't do anything	I would call the police or social assistance	I would support him directly	I don't know/no answer
Every day	4,4%	31,4%	52,7%	11,5%
Often	4,4%	39,5%	41,6%	14,6%
Sometimes/Not at all	9,6%	30,6%	45,0%	14,8%
All the sample	7,9%	31,7%	46,4%	14%

As we can see, those who pray every day to a greater extent would directly support the abused person on public transport. This is how more than half of the respondents in that group would behave, compared to 41.6% of those who pray often and 45% of those who pray sometimes and not at all. At the same time, we notice that those who pray Sometimes/Not at all in a larger proportion (9.6%) would not undertake anything in this situation, than those in the Every day and Often groups (4.4% each).

Another situation was where the study participant would see an elderly person alone in the street on a very frosty night.

Table 2. Willingness to help an elderly person alone on the street on a very frosty night, depending on the frequency of prayer.

	I wouldn't do anything	I would call the police or social assistance	I would support him directly	I don't know/no answer
Every day	0,4%	30,5%	57,5%	11,5%
Often	0,6%	36,3%	54,2%	8,9%
Sometimes/Not at all	4,1%	31,6%	48,6%	15,7%
All the sample	2,7%	32,6%	51,9%	12,8%

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Here we observe two trends, as the frequency of prayer increases, the share of those who choose to give direct support increases (from 48.6% for the Sometimes/Not at all to 57.5% for the Every day group), at the same time, decreases the percentage of those who would do nothing (from 4.1% to 0.4%).

In the third situation, respondents had to answer what they would do if they saw a Roma person being verbally abused in a store.

Table 3. Willingness to help a verbally abused Roma person in a shop, depending on the frequency of prayer.

	I wouldn't do anything	I would call the police or social assistance	I would support him directly	I don't know/no answer
Every day	11,9%	25,7%	31,0%	31,4%
Often	8,2%	23,8%	29,3%	38,6%
Sometimes/Not at all	16,4%	20,2%	20,9%	42,6%
All the sample	13,6%	22%	25%	39,4%

In this situation, a large proportion of respondents did not know how to answer. We notice that the share of those who did not give an answer increases as the frequency of prayer decreases (from 31.4% to 42.6%). At the same time, the greater the frequency of prayer, the greater the share of those who choose to provide direct support or turn to an institution.

In the fourth situation, the subjects had to answer what they would do if they saw someone mistreating an animal in the park/street.

Table 4. Willingness to intervene if someone mistreats an animal in the park/street, depending on the frequency of the prayer.

	I wouldn't do anything	I would call the police or social assistance	I would support him directly	I don't know/no answer
Every day	5,3%	31,4%	53,1%	10,2%
Often	4,9%	25,7%	48,5%	20,9%
Sometimes/Not at all	8,4%	21,6%	50,2%	19,8%

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All the sample	6,5%	24,5%	50,4%	18,7%
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We found that in this situation we have a higher proportion of non-responses in the Often (20.9%) and Sometimes/Not at all (19.8%) groups compared to the Everyday group (10.2%). We can see, at the same time, that the share of those who turn to institutions increases with the increase in the frequency of prayer.

3.1.2 Civic participation/social activism and the prayer frequency

Next, we wanted to see to what extent the share of participation in various events and activities changes according to the frequency of prayer. In order to facilitate the analysis and visibility of the results, we combined the responses related to the frequency of participation as follows: Not at all and Rarely in one category, Frequently and Very frequently in another category.

Table 5. The degree of participation in various events and activities, depending on the frequency of prayer.

		Not at all and Rarely	Frequently and Very frequently	I don't know/it's hard to answer	Significance of the Chi-Square Test of Association
Community meetings/gatherings	Every day	77,9%	20,8%	1,3%	p=0,362
	Often	82,1%	16,9%	1,1%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	83,3%	15,3%	1,5%	
	All the sample	80,9%	17,8%	1,3%	
Cultural/social events organized at community level	Every day	69,9%	28,8%	1,3%	p<0,01
	Often	75,3%	23,4%	1,3%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	80,0%	18,2%	1,8%	
	All the sample	76,4%	22,2%	1,4%	
Charity activities to help vulnerable individuals/families	Every day	67,7%	28,3%	4,0%	p<0,001
	Often	81,4%	16,2%	2,3%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	85,7%	11,3%	3,0%	
	All the sample	81,0%	16,4%	2,7%	
Voluntary activities	Every day	70,8%	24,3%	4,9%	p<0,001

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organized by the church you belong to	Often	82,7%	16,5%	,8%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	90,3%	7,6%	2,1%	
	All the sample	82,5%	15,1%	2,4%	
Voluntary activities organized by public organizations/community leaders/parent associations	Every day	77,4%	18,1%	4,4%	p<0,001
	Often	79,3%	15,6%	5,1%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	89,4%	7,0%	3,6%	
	All the sample	83,6%	12,3%	4,1%	
You have given monetary donations to charity	Every day	62,8%	35,0%	2,2%	p<0,001
	Often	75,9%	21,5%	2,5%	
	Sometimes/Not at all	81,9%	14,5%	3,6%	
	All the sample	76,6%	20,1%	3,4%	

We found no statistically significant differences in how the results were distributed by frequency of prayer for attending "Community level meetings/gatherings". For the other events and activities, we have statistically significant results. As the frequency of prayer increases, so does the frequency of participation in all types of events and activities.

Greater differences are found between those who pray every day (28.3%) and the other frequency groups (16.2% and 11.3%) regarding "Charity activities to help vulnerable people/families". We find a similar situation for "Giving monetary donations for charitable purposes" (Every day - 35.0%, Often - 21.5%, Sometimes/Not at all - 14.5%).

Those who pray every day and those who pray frequently, on the one hand, have a greater percentage (18.1% and 15.6%) compared to those who pray sometimes or not at all (7.0%) regarding "Voluntary activities organized by public organizations/community leaders/parent associations".

In conclusion, we can say that those who pray more frequently report a higher level of social activism and participation.

3.2 Frequency of prayer and trust in people

In the following section, we aimed to analyse to what extent the frequency of prayer is associated with levels of trust in various categories of people. In the questionnaire used in the quantitative research of 2021, there was the question "In general, would you say that most people in the Republic of

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Moldova can be trusted or do you need to be vigilant in your relationship with people?". We tried to see how people of various prayer frequency answer this question.

Table 6. Answers to the question of whether the majority of people in the Republic of Moldova can be trusted, depending on the frequency of prayer

	Most people can be trusted	You have to be vigilant	You can't trust people at all	I don't know/it's hard to answer
Every day	17,3%	70,8%	11,1%	,9%
Often	6,8%	69,4%	23,4%	,4%
Sometimes/Not at all	9,0%	73,8%	17,2%	0%
All the sample	8,7%	73,3%	17,7%	0,2%

We observe that those who pray every day are more likely to say that they can trust most people (17.3%), this is practically double the percentage of those who pray sometimes or not at all (9%) and the whole sample (8.7%). We find that praying every day is indeed associated with greater trust in people in general. At the same time, it is interesting to note that those who pray often are more sceptical about trust than those who pray every day and, at the same time, than those who pray sometimes or not at all, stating in a greater share that you cannot trust people at all (23.4%).

Respondents were asked to imagine a situation in which they lost their wallet with a large amount of money. Then rate the likelihood that someone they don't know will return their wallet. We set out to analyse how study participants answered this question in correlation with how often they pray.

Table 7. Evaluating the probability that a stranger will return the wallet with money, depending on the frequency of prayer

	High / Very high	Little / Not at all	I don't know/it's hard to answer
Every day	9,7%	81,0%	9,3%
Often	4,6%	88,6%	6,8%
Sometimes/Not at all	4,2%	86,7%	9,1%
All the sample	4,9%	87,1%	8,0%

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We can see that those who pray every day rate a higher probability (9.7%) than those who pray Often (4.6%) and Sometimes/Not at all (4.2%).

In another question, respondents were asked to rate the probability of returning the wallet if it had been a neighbour instead of A stranger.

Table 8. Evaluating the probability that a neighbour will return the wallet with money, depending on the frequency of the prayer

	High / Very high	Little / Not at all	I don't know/ it's hard to answer
Every day	40,7%	53,5%	5,8%
Often	27,0%	63,3%	9,7%
Sometimes/Not at all	20,3%	68,9%	10,8%
All the sample	25,0%	65,5%	9,4%

In this case, too, those who pray every day rated the probability significantly higher (40.7%) than those who pray Often (27%) or Sometimes/Not at all (20.3%).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The idea of solidarity and mutual help is intrinsic to Christianity, and every Christian is invited to move from orthodoxy to orthopraxy (from the right confession and glorification of God to the service of the neighbour and the world), one complementing the other. Both are very important and have an inseparable connection with each other.

The results of the quantitative study show us that those who pray every day are more likely to give direct support to a mistreated person on public transport, or to an elderly person alone in the street on a very frosty night. The higher the frequency of prayer, the higher the share of those who choose to provide direct support or call an institution if they see a Roma person being verbally abused in a store. The share of those who will call the institutions when they see that someone mistreats an animal in the park/street increases with the increase in the frequency of prayer.

Those who pray more frequently report higher levels of social activism and participation. Those who pray every day say to a greater extent that they can trust most people.

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It is important to keep in mind that not every kind of prayer has the same quality. Many aspects matter, such as the time, the place, the context, etc. In the present study, we could only assess the frequency with which the respondents pray. But, a more frequent prayer increases the chances that the one who prays will have greater access to the contents offered by the faith he has. And these contents provide him with models of behaviour.

Active Christians can turn to several sources that show them what kind of behaviour they can adopt. These are the life and activity of the person of Jesus Christ (from the accounts of the gospels), patristic literature, the lives of the saints, the concrete example of some servants of the Church (hierarchs, priests, etc.), the concrete example of some Christians, etc.

Studies in the field of prosocial behaviours show that exposure to prosocial models increases the likelihood of human helping. And people who have experienced the emotion of moral elevation tend to see people as better and are motivated to become better themselves [12].

Here the theme and problem of the responsibility of media producers and consumers regarding the information that the former produce and the latter choose to receive, comes into focus. It matters a lot what kind of information we consume every day because it sets our way of being and behaviour tomorrow. The presentation of models of prosocial behaviour in the media would have an important impact on consumers.

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