<u>The Christian Origins of Universal Solidarity:</u>

<u>Thinking through Christ's Call to Leave "father/ mother/ children"</u>

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Abstract:

To address some of the questions that have come out in the debates on the refugee crisis, I will consider, in Part I, the contrast between the attitudes towards refugees in terms of two concepts of solidarity. In Part II, I will ally myself with a line of thought that holds that there is a longer, Christian genealogy to modern concepts that we usually see as the result of the Enlightenment. Thus, Christ's message to leave "mother/ father/ "children" brings across a radical case for universal solidarity, which implies that the care for all and the care for some are not just different notions, but they are ultimately irreconcilable moral intuitions.

<u>Keywords:</u> concepts of solidarity, cosmopolitan, Luke 14:26, Mark 10:29, refugee crisis, solidarity, Stoic "circles of sympathy," universal solidarity, *Willkomenskultur*

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The passage in which Christ instructs his followers to leave their families and loved ones for his sake is surely one of the most disturbing in the Bible. This is how it goes in the Gospel of Mark 10:29 (there is a similar version in Luke 18:29): 'Truly I tell you […] no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for My sake and for the gospel will fail to receive a hundredfold in the present age […] and in the age to come, eternal life.' There is even a stronger version in Luke 14:26: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, as well as his own life, he cannot be my disciple.'

What is confusing about these passages is that, if interpreted literally, they sound so much out of the spirit of the main message of Christ. Recently, in the context of the refugee crisis and the reactions it has provoked, I have been re-thinking Christ injunction to leave 'mother/ father/ children' and follow him. My text here is, thus, meant as a contribution to some of the recent literature that studies the refugee crisis from a religious, especially Christian perspective.[2]

In an earlier piece of 2016, I paid attention to the contrast between the *Wilkommenskultur* (the culture of welcome) of Germany and some other Western European countries towards the refugees and the determined refusal of Eastern European societies to accept anyone at all (women, children, persecuted Christians, no one has been excepted).[3] The present article revisits the topic of the refugee crisis and offers some reflections five years later. In the meantime, things have changed quite dramatically - the initial enthusiasm of many Western Europeans has cooled and anti-immigration parties have been on the rise. The contrast between attitudes to the refugees in Eastern and Western Europe that interested me in 2015 is no longer there. If there is any contrast it is between the *Willkomenskultur* of five years ago and the lack of it all over Europe in 2020. In the previous refugee wave, the hero was the Greek fisherman, who was risking his life at sea to rescue desperate people from drowning. Today, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, is praising Greece for being 'a European shield,' referring to Greek ships trying, in effect, to

capsize dinghies full of refugees, trying to enter Europe.[4] What has happened? Why *Willkomenskultur* and the solidarity it implied proved so difficult to sustain?

To address some of the questions that have come out in the debates on the refugee crisis, I will consider, in Part I, the contrast between the attitudes towards refugees not so much in terms of compassion (or lack of), but in terms of two quite distinct, even 'clashing' concepts of solidarity. In Part II, I will ally myself with a line of thought that holds that there is a longer, Christian genealogy to modern concepts that we usually see as the result of the Enlightenment. Thus, Christ's message brings across a strong case for universal solidarity. The care for all rather than the care only for one's family is, indeed, one of the central messages of Christ. Further, I will interpret Christ's radical call to leave 'mother/ father/ children' as implying that the care for all and the care for some are not just different notions, but they are ultimately irreconcilable moral intuitions. In this way, Christ goes to the very heart of the problem of universal solidarity. The Christ-inspired variant of universal solidarity becomes an option only for those who have transcended the more narrow solidarity to the biological family or one's community.

Finally, while the starting ground for my reflections is Christ's call to leave one's family, I will not be looking at the history of the reception of this idea in Christian thought through the ages. This history, interesting though it is – for instance, Franciscan thinkers in the medieval period engaged directly with the passages under my attention – would not only be impossible to cover in the short space here, but would also push the discussion away from what is my main focus here, i.e., a type of solidarity exemplified by Christ's words and by the figure of Christ. It is this type of radical solidarity, which, I believe, goes to the very heart of the problem that we face nowadays.

The Clash of Solidarities

In an article of 2004 that received strong criticism from what is usually called 'the Left,' the British journalist David Goodhart wrote that 'put bluntly – most of us prefer our own kind.'[5] He also suggested that a society that is too diverse, as a result of immigration, would find it more difficult to sustain the model of the welfare state. In simple words, people are not too eager to pay taxes for those who are different from them. It is telling in many ways, that the offence that Goodhart caused at the time is, more or less, mainstream opinion at

present. Even in Sweden, which has accepted more refugees per capita than anyone else in Europe, *Wilkommenskultur* has soured. It is quite a jump for a country that has seen itself as a 'superpower in terms of doing good things'[6] to having a Neo-Nazi, anti-immigrant party in Parliament.[7] In the meantime, in semi-functioning countries of the EU such as Bulgaria, desperately poor pensioners demonstrate against plans that refugees be settled in their vicinity. They are utterly furious not that their pensions have been stolen, that the hospitals are not working and they cannot afford life-saving medication. No, their protests are fuelled by anger that their half-empty villages might receive a few refugees fleeing the war in Syria. These developments have shocked many and have led to much confusion and misunderstanding. It seems to me that we can get a better idea of what has been going on if we see these phenomena against the background of what the political scientist Ivan Krastev has called in his recent book 'the clash of solidarities.'[8]

Protests against the plans to open a refugee centre in Lesovo, Bulgaria;

The poster says: 'You feed the refugees, (while) you give up on the pensioners'

A great number of the people in Bulgaria, who get pensions of 150 euros, survive on remittances, i.e., their children and relatives working abroad send them money. At the same time, the very same people who would receive help, as well as those who give their often hard-earned last penny for their ‘mother/ father/ children’ show frequently a callous lack of solidarity when they are faced with strangers in need. And they do not feel any sense of shame, mainly because they do not see themselves as bad people. On the contrary, they are rightly regarded by their friends and acquaintances as good people whose everyday existence is a chain of sacrifices for their families. It is also noticeable, though not much discussed in the Western press, that countries, in which governments and sometimes ordinary people have been using some of the most vicious anti-refugee rhetoric, have been accepting large numbers of migrants, who, however, come from societies that are felt to be culturally similarly. Poland has taken in more than a million Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country and so has Hungary.[9] Indeed, as Goodhart pointed out, people find it easier to feel empathy and show solidarity for those who appear similar (culturally, in terms of religion, etc.).

Thus, the problem does not appear to be a lack of solidarity as such, but rather a difference in the understanding of whom we owe solidarity to. Whether it is your immediate family or the larger community you belong to or people whom you find easier to identify with – in all these cases you have what we could call a civic, narrow sense of solidarity with others. In this sense, we are moving within the Stoic ‘circles of sympathy’[10] – starting from one’s self, moving concentrically to include one’s family, one neighbours, a larger circle would include one’s nation, the religious community you belong to, etc. And a circle is, by definition, a figure of inclusion (of what is within the circle), but also of exclusion (of what is without).

Ironically, if we stay with the figure of the circle, the larger the circle and the more people we extend our sympathy – or what I call here, solidarity - to, the greater the space of those we exclude. It, thus, illustrates an idea that is profoundly troubling and namely that the two senses of solidarity we attracted attention to may very well be irreconcilable. Any circle of sympathy would, by definition, rely on exclusion of some (the vast majority). In this sense, I understand Christ’s message as a call of thinking and acting beyond the ‘circles of sympathy.’ For anyone who belongs to the circle, there are many others who do not. To transcend the ‘circles of sympathy’ could be the only way in which one could develop a concept of universal solidarity. It seems to me that what Christ captured the profoundly unsettling idea that caring for your loved ones and caring for all can be profoundly

contradictory. The two senses of solidarity clash, as they grow out of two different understandings of humanity.

Christ's Version of Universal Solidarity: 'Hate your mother/ father/ children'

In this paper, I think through what I call Christ's version of universal solidarity, based on some of his sayings in the Bible. I do not look at the history of the reception of this idea in Christian theology. By following a certain line of thought in contemporary scholarship, I will suggest that the origins of the radical version of universal solidarity go back to Christ's shocking call to leave or even hate one's mother/father/children. If this idea is accepted, it would clearly stand at odd with the common view that the concept of universal solidarity is the product of Enlightenment thought.

For example, in his recent study, Anthony Padgen goes back to this notion and maintains that, 'it is unlikely that anyone in Europe before the eighteenth century would have regarded the request that he or she should concern themselves with suffering of Africans or Asians as anything other than extraordinary, of not actually offensive.'[11] He further claims that the Christian virtue of charity towards "others" was understood in the sense of charity towards 'neighbours.'[12] The latter happens to be a leitmotif in writings by members of the so-called New Atheism movement. I believe it to be false,[13] as I have explained in an earlier piece, which draws attention to Christ repeated identification with the 'stranger.'[14]

Let me pick up two examples of Enlightenment thought – David Hume and Adam Smith, who deal with the topic under our attention. What I call 'solidarity' is more or less what Hume and Smith refer to as 'sympathy' and they both agree that it is directly related to our proximity to the other person/persons. Thus, in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals in Moral and Political Philosophy,* Hume says over and over again that 'sympathy [...] with persons remote from us [is] much fainter than with persons near and contiguous.'[15] We have a tendency, he continues, to prefer ourselves and those 'intimately connected with us.'[16] Adam Smith, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* goes back to this idea and writes in the same spirit: 'All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety upon that account, seems to be no part of our duty.'[17] Probably Smith's most famous example is his observation that most of us would be

far more distraught by the loss of our little finger than by the death of millions of strangers in a terrible earthquake. As the contemporary scholar Fonna Forman-Barzilai has shown, Adam Smith's conception of sympathy is indebted to the Stoic notion of the 'circles of sympathy.'[18] Not surprisingly, he is in agreement with the Stoics that sympathy/affection/solidarity weaken the greater the distance from the self (physical, cultural, religious distance). However, he finds the Stoics' aspiration that, through the use of reason, we overcome this model inherent in human nature 'absurd and unreasonable.'[19]

It may be objected that I have tendentiously picked up examples from Enlightenment thought, which support the hypothesis advanced here. Further, both thinkers, representatives of the Scottish tradition, could be seen as belonging to what Jonathan I. Israel has called the 'moderate Enlightenment,' one of the two strands of Enlightenment thought. On the other hand, according to Israel, it was the other branch of thought, the so-called 'radical Enlightenment,' originating with Spinoza, that gave rise to the modern liberal-democratic state.[20] The issue is quite complicated and has been much debated. However, Adam Smith seems like an appropriate example having in mind that he has been 'often celebrated often championed as a prophet of human sympathy.'[21] At the same time, however much we admire the modern liberal-democratic state and for very good reasons, it has failed, rather spectacularly, in dealing with the refugee crisis. In this sense, it appears quite appropriate to look for guidance at other sources than the Enlightenment for the concept of universal solidarity, which interests me here.

I will, therefore, associate myself with a line of thought that maintains that there is a religious genealogy to many of our modern concepts, which we tend to associate exclusively with the rise of the modern Western, secular philosophy in the Enlightenment. Ironically, it was Nietzsche, who first drew attention in a systematic way to the notion that modernity was the result of the secularization of Christian ideas.[22] In the first half of the twentieth century, several historians concerned themselves with the Christian roots of modern concepts.[23] More recently, some of the most interesting work in philosophy has been done from the perspective that philosophy needs to reflect on its 'own religious-metaphysical origins.'[24]

This is the wider background for a well-known article by Werner Hamacher, which opens with a provocative statement: 'For classical Greek authors of political theory, it was inconceivable that anyone outside the *polis* could be human. The conception changed only with the emergence of Christianity.'[25] Peter Rhodes has also noticed that 'the foundation of

democracy [in ancient Athens]' was not based on 'human rights, but on citizen rights.'[26] In simple words, it is only the citizens of the polis who were seen by the community as endowed with full humanity and, therefore, possessing rights. Slaves, foreigners, enemies in war were excluded not just from citizenship and the protection of the law, but from humanity. The classicist scholar David Konstan, while much more nuanced in his conclusions, also agrees that in the classical world there was 'little, if any sense that human beings, simply by virtue of their humanity, were entitled to a special regard.'[27] In his excellent *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism,* Larry Siedentop writes in a similar vein that in 'the world of antiquity,' the family was 'everything.' The concept of a common humanity simply did not exist. The concern with humans as such was 'not deemed a virtue and would probably have been unintelligible.'[28] It is only with the Roman Empire and connected to the idea of a universal empire that we come across the tendency of thinking of the entire world as one single polis or community. However, even the Cynics' and the Stoics' notion of a 'citizen of the world' seems to have applied to the wise alone (a rather limited category of humanity, one suspects, at the time and now). In a certain sense, Christianity invented the concept of global solidarity since, as Hamacher says, it was 'not the civic religion of the citizen of a city-state, but of universal human beings.'[29]

It is a comforting thought that one can show both civic solidarity towards his own community and a universal solidarity towards the world at large. Being good without any conflict is an enviable state indeed. Christ, however, shakes you out of this pleasant state. To follow him – and this does not mean to care for him, but to care for what he cared for, i.e. every single living being – you had to give up your narrow sense of solidarity. It would not do to enlarge your 'circle of sympathy,' you had to leave civic solidarity behind and develop this new, larger, deeply Christ-like solidarity for all. This is the sense in which I understand Christ's call not just to leave, but even to 'hate' those closest to you. People are rarely in need to be reminded to love themselves and their families. At the same time, they appear to be in a constant need of being reminded of the worth and value of others, of strangers. To actually have love for others requires a ceaseless spiritual effort.

In the words of Fr. Andreas (Andreopoulos), when Jesus asks us to make a 'transcendence, to move from the biological family to the spiritual family – and ultimately to humanity,'[30] this may very well be the most difficult struggle and the greatest sacrifice that God asked of us. What makes it so hard is that it 'unnatural' in the literal sense that it is not a state or emotion that exists in nature. Some atheists have made a big deal that human beings

have developed their moral sense in their struggle for survival.[31] You care for your children, you help your neighbours, they help you in return in order for your community to endure. The late Christopher Hitchens may very well have been right that you do not need God for that. However, caring for complete strangers whom you have never met cannot be explained in these terms. As Theo Hobson wrote recently, 'universal humanism' and 'humanitarian ideals are not natural, nor are they rationally deducible.'[32] If a global solidarity is 'unnatural,' then it requires an overcoming of the state of nature and a spiritual struggle, which, I am suggesting here, is profoundly Christ-like. I am by no means claiming, however, that only Christians or even mainly Christians are more likely to develop a sense of solidarity for all. I do believe, however, that this is a moral intuition, which Christ brought to the fore in a radical and unprecedented manner. Engaging with it can help illuminate the very possibility of universal solidarity.

Conclusion

The present paper is a reflection on two concepts of solidarity – a narrow, civic solidarity to your family and community and a wider, universal sense of solidarity with all human beings as such. The former is, by no means, devalued. The care, love, and compassion towards those close to you are at the heart of some of the greatest literature in the world. However, I have suggested, that it is universal solidarity that lies at the heart of a Christ-centred worldview. In fact, it is possible to think of this larger concept of solidarity as invented by Christ. Christ's call to his followers to leave "mother/ father/ children" and follow him brings to the fore the clash of these two concepts of solidarity.

The reflection on solidarity in this paper was provoked by the reactions to the refugee crisis in Europe over the last several years. Rather than thinking of attitudes to the refugees in terms of compassion and lack of it, generosity and selfishness, etc., I have suggested that we approach these reactions through the lens of two 'clashing' concepts of solidarity.

[1] I thank the following friends and colleagues, with whom I discussed various drafts of this paper: David Konstan, Ivan Krastev, Andreas Anreopoulos, Ivona Poynz, Venelin Ganev, and Dessy Gavrilova.

[2] Among the dozens of publications, see: Michael Gmelch, *Refugees Welcome: Eine Herausforderung für Christen* (Refugees Welcome: A Challenge for Christians) (Würzburg: Echter, 2016); Luca Mavelli and Erin Wilson, (eds.), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016); Ulrich Schmiedel and Graeme Smith, (eds.), *Religion in the European Refugee Crisis* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); David Hollenbach, *Humanity in Crisis: Ethical and Religious Responses to the Refugee Crisis* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

[3] Antonova, Clemena, '"Everyone is responsible for everyone and everything:" Insights on the Refugee Crisis Drawn from Russian Religious Philosophy,' *Sobornost,* 38/1, 2016**,** pp.20-34.

[4] See a recent article in the *Economist* of 14 March 2020, "Europe Hopes Brutality at the Border Will Keep Refugees away."

[5] David Goodhart, 'Too Diverse?,' *Prospect Magazine,* 2004.

[6] Marten Blix cited in Peter S. Goodman's article, 'The Nordic Model May Be the Best Cushion against Capitalism. Can It Survive Immigration?' *New York Times,* 11 June 2019.

[7] The Party of the Sweden Democrats became the third largest block in Parliament as a result of the elections in 2018.

[8] Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[9] It should be mentioned, though, that the Ukrainians in Central European countries are accepted as migrant workers, who are not granted any political rights, and not as refugees.

[10] I will go back to the notion of the 'circles of sympathy' in the next section.

[11] Anthony Padgen, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.270.

[12] Padgen, *The Enlightenment*, p.270.

[13] On the Biblical meaning of 'neighbour' as 'all other persons,' see Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993).

[14] Antonova, '"Everyone is responsible for everyone and everything".' See also, Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook of Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010) and Christine Pohl, 'Responding to Strangers: Insights from the Christian Tradition,' *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 19/1, 2006, pp.81-101.

[15] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals in Moral and Political Philosophy,* ed. J.B. Schneewind (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1983), pp.48-50.

[16] Hume, *An Inquiry*, p.49.

[17] Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Press, 1982), p.140.

[18] Fonna Forman-Barzilai, 'Sympathy in Spaces(s): Adam Smith on Proximity,' *Political Theory,* 33/2, 2005, pp.189-217 and *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[19] Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* p.140.

[20] See Jonathan I. Israel's magisterial three-volume history – *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); *The Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752,* (Oxford: OUP, 2006); *The Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790,* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

[21] Forman-Barzilai, 'Sympathy in Spaces(s),' p.201.

[22] Nietzsche's observation that 'the democratic movement is the inheritance of the Christian movement' (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1885), tr. Helen Zimmer (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1909), p.127) was certainly not meant as a compliment to either democracy or Christianity.

[23] Etienne Gilson and Alexandre Koyré in the 1920s and 30s, Karl Löwith in his *The Meaning of History* (1949), etc.

[24] Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p.38. Some of the most important works are Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[25] Werner Hamacher, 'The Right to Have Rights (Four-and-a-Half Remarks),' *South Atlantic Quarterly,* 103/2/3, Spring/ Summer 2004, pp.343-56.

[26] Peter Rhodes, 'Democracy and Empire' in L. Samons, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.33.

[27] David Konstan, 'Emotions and Human Rights,' *Perspective,* 17, Spring 2018, p.30. See also, Konstan's chapter on solidarity in the ancient classical world in his *In the Orbit of Love: Affection in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), Chapter: 'Love and the State,' pp.159-187.

[28] Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism,* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp.15 and 24.

[29] Werner Hamacher, 'On the Right to Have Rights: Human Rights, Marx, and Arendt,' *New Centennial Review,* 14/2, 'Law and Violence,' Fall 2014, p.170.

[30] Communication of 13 July 2019. Andreas Andreopoulos is a Reader in Eastern Orthodox Christianity at the University of Winchester, U.K.

[31] See, for instance, Peter Singer and Marc Hauser's 'Godless Morality' in Peter Singer, *Ethics in the Real World,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[32] Theo Hobson, *God Created Humanism: The Christian Basis of Secular Values,* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2017), p.6.