

PROSOCIAL VIRTUES IN PANDEMIC CRISIS. A CHRISTIAN-RELIGIOUS REFLECTION

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Humans are biologically vulnerable beings, a situation dealt with by cooperation, which often involves and at the same time leads to significant physical closeness. Infectious diseases, especially those with an epidemic spread, endanger both the human biological organism and physically close social interactions; to protect the body, measures are taken to limit close interactions. This essay analyzes the effect of physical distancing imposed in the COVID-19 pandemic on close aid relationships, from a Christian religious and moral perspective, characterized by the ethics of virtue. The parable of the Good Samaritan, reinterpreted in the context of the current situation, is used as a heuristic tool. In such exceptional situations, the virtues indispensable to a successful strategy, such as trust, responsibility, solidarity and even heroism, are only revealed on condition of their prior cultivation in ordinary life situations. The role of a school education capable of producing prosocial virtues is highlighted, as well as the indispensable role of communities on a meso-social scale, such as the Church (parishes), in order to ensure to these virtues an inclusiveness that transcends the circle of closest interactions (family, friends) and reaches out to farther human realms (anonymous).

Keywords: virtue, prosocial, social distancing, Good Samaritan, pandemic, COVID-19



Taking the distance

The emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the infectious disease COVID-19 created such a pressing situation, that beyond the mobilization of the entire health system (by being directly engaged or turned into a state of readiness), we have come to the point where decisions concerning the sum of our daily concerns, private and public, are viewed, evaluated and taken while first pondering on the risks of infection and the available therapeutic resources. The state of emergency, in its various degrees of intensity, is not only a measure of public health policy, but also a state of mind, and the two are amplifying each other. Which is, of course, natural, insofar as we are dealing with the realities of an issue of global scope and maximum stake: the life or death of many fellow human beings. The two general preventive measures imposed, one based on maintaining a minimum social distance and the other on wearing a protective mask, are as basic in their materiality as they are relevant not only for the epidemiological control of the pandemic (“flattening the infection curve”), but also for the collective representation of human coexistence. And in order to

survive and to live well - to reiterate the famous definition of the meanings of a *politeia* from Aristotle - it is necessary, under the new conditions, to adjust our social interactions according to a safety distance between individuals that is significantly bigger than in ordinary situations.¹

To promote the expected adjustment, the public authorities have launched audio and visual campaigns for the promotion of these measures, especially the one referring to the obligation of wearing the mask. The street posters sponsored by the Government, for example, contain straightforward messages that begin with “I wear the mask because...” followed by various motivations that the authors of the project consider the vast majority of citizens can internalize, such as “because I care.”² Unlike wearing a mask, the measure of social distance - in fact, of distancing -, also imposed by legal norms, is promoted less vigorously, at least not by the government’s street publicity campaign.

Yet, I came across a poster of a known store chain with the message “in a pandemic, we are closer from a distance”. It sounds like a successful formulation through its apparent paradox, which uses the dialectical relationship between



distance and closeness and the two planes of this relationship, the physical and the moral. Sometimes physical closeness can incur moral distance - for example, in the case of any direct physical violence - while in its turn, physical distance can mean moral closeness, as in the present case, where physical distance aims to prevent biological contamination. Situations in which distance, not proximity, expresses a positive attitude towards someone else are not, in fact, rare. One everyday example here is respecting the physical space of a person's privacy, which is recognized and protected by law. The reason is our physical vulnerability and its moral implications, the inability to control all aspects of our bodily existence and to defend or isolate them from possible abusive interventions by others on us, which requires ensuring a space of protection in which the person can live her own weaknesses, deficiencies, or disabilities, without being detrimentally subjected to constraints.

A neighborhood species

What we usually associate with positive interpersonal relationships is still the physical closeness, and not the distance, in the sense that, for example, when we want to designate a partner in these relationships we talk about our "neighbor" (Old English, *neah-gebur*, the one who dwell near), not about our "distant". Although they could be simply synonymous, possibly complementary, no doubt that nearness and not distance is the spatial concept of reference for inter-human relations. The explanation for this lies in the decisive role that close cooperation between people plays for their survival and well-being. This close cooperation is indispensable when we consider the vulnerabilities and the environment of the human condition.³ Our biological belonging to the mammalian species and its characteristics such as altriciality and neoteny require, until adulthood and also after that, not only some distant cooperation, but primarily one in which our bodies come into direct sensory contact, very often through all our five senses.⁴ Even science has admitted the crucial role that the practices of carrying children in arms and fondling them, which are immemorial practices in any human group, are playing in the normal neural and psychological development of a child, as well as in the psychosomatic well-being of parents.⁵ Apart from childhood, family, friendly or romantic embrace, as well as various gestures of social touch, through which we express emotions and positive relationships (compassion, gratitude, joy), all have a major contribution to the emergence, development, consumption and regeneration social capital, an essential resource for any sustainable human community.⁶

The way in which infectious diseases and their epidemic manifestation are affecting human closeness is a particularly important topic. The spread of a highly contagious virus, with significant morbidity and mortality, such as SARS-CoV-2, which parasitizes human organisms and physical interactions is putting both to the test in many ways. This article is focusing on one aspect only, that of prosocial behavior, also dubbed in more popular terms as the act of doing good, seen as one of the most significant human practices, viewed here from the perspective

of the Christian faith. In what way are the sanitary restrictions on proximity during the pandemic interfering with the pan-human need for mutual help, in which the physical approach is as natural as possible?

The Good Samaritan revisited

What might the well-known parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), a paradigmatic passage for the Christian understanding of doing good, tell us in this regard? The original version is relevant for the mundane situations in which we find ourselves, in which both the moral and the physical closeness are following each other. Yet how would the parable's main character behave in times of pandemic? Let us remember that the parable represents an implicit answer, in an analogous key, given by Jesus to a teacher of the law who had first asked him about the rule of salvation. After enunciating himself the commandment to love God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:6 and Leviticus 19:18) the teacher proceeds to ask Jesus for the clarification of this apparently obvious and quite general term: "who is my neighbor"? He is the one who will give the implicit answer after the parable is told, when he receives Jesus' question "which of these three do you think was the neighbor of the one who fell among the robbers?" Obviously, the meaning of the parable and the question returned is that closeness is established not by the other person's situation or position towards oneself, but rather by one's positioning towards the person.

A such understanding - deepened by Jesus' surprising choice of the character of a Samaritan, an outcast from the chosen people, the very last figure that the lawyer and the Jewish audience would have thought of - allows the inclusion into the category of human closeness of practically any two people, of which at least one is offering, and the other is enjoying this closeness, regardless of their biographical circumstances. Other details of the parable and of the historical and narrative context of its utterance are also significant for its interpretation.⁷

Regarding the question that is examined here, it can be said that the relevance of these details may seem superfluous by the simple observation that in the situation of an epidemic of a contagious disease, to which we are trying to apply the parable, the recommendation or even legal obligation is, on the contrary, to avoid closeness and contact with everybody, with the exception of appropriately qualified personnel, equipped for interactions that involve direct contact. In such a scenario, we can imagine - *mutatis mutandis* - the way in which our Samaritan could show compassion, by stopping, examining from a distance, quickly calling the emergency services and leaving the place as soon as they appear. Obviously, the reason for not engaging in direct contact, or for keeping "social distance" can be selfish, yet justifiable, meant to avoid the risk of contamination from a possible infectious person. Yet this is not necessarily the only justification. There is also the possibility to avoid exposing the fallen person to the risk of infection if the Samaritan himself is an asymptomatic and, as such, unadvised carrier of the virus. In the perspective of such risks, associated with too little knowledge of the factual situation, an elementary

moral principle is that of caution, similar, in fact, to *primum non nocere*, the first deontological principle of medicine. This could also be the meaning of the message promoted through the street poster mentioned above. Therefore, if one is impaired in manifesting compassion through a safe way of coming near and showing goodness, one has the alternative opportunity to manifest the same love and compassion, yet in an opposite way, by abstaining from even unintentionally causing harm, in other words, by not coming close.

One serious moral problem can be raised by the urgency of the situation of the victim, in a scenario of imminent death in which postponing the direct intervention, no matter how risky, may imply the futility of another subsequent intervention, no matter how professional. The Samaritan then must choose between the risk of contamination and the risk of death.⁸ Although it could be a not less common case - and we cannot rely on media reports to get an idea - of people with serious illnesses, for example, who do not have access to adequate care due to the "covidization" of medical resources, in my focus are the more general situations in which we can all find ourselves.

Returning to the scenario above, the parable seems to lose its relevance in the case of imposed social distancing. Not passing with indifference by a fallen person, but rather going around them, in respect of the rules, and even reporting the case to competent authorities might be a commendable attitude, especially in individualistic societies, but the reason why the Samaritan's behavior deserves credit would now fade compared to those of the Samaritan's professional substitutes.⁹ The emergency professions are always heroic, but this precisely makes them less exemplary for the rest of us.

Interestingly, however, the victim could also tell us something about our context. The exegetes have noted the emphasis on his vulnerability through physical (almost dead), but also social details (dispossessed, naked, nameless). Especially the anonymity of the victim was interpreted as designating a universal role, which can be played, involuntarily, by absolutely anyone.¹⁰ In this sense, the parable contains its own dose of discussion around distancing, if we consider the fact that positive physical approaches usually lead to forms of *personal* knowledge and interaction. Still, the parable places under the veil of ignorance not only the current identity of the victim, but also the possibility of a reunion (it is not, of course, excluded, as it is also not excluded that at the benefactor's returning to the guest house, the victim, possibly restored, will be gone already). Therefore, they do not matter since it is the active subject of closeness that is in the center of attention, and not its passive object - the victim. In fact, the one who realizes the approach is, in the original logic of the parable, also its main beneficiary. Only because he approaches physically as a manifestation of moral closeness (by identifying himself, even transiently, with the victim's condition) does the Samaritan prove to be merciful and, as such, worthy of praise and imitation. In turn, worthy of compassion, the victim has neither identity nor participation. This anonymity is important because, through its universality, it highlights the unconditional, selfless character of doing good.

Anonymous social bonds?

At the same time, an interaction under anonymity, not reciprocated, does not create bonds, whereas bonds - *lasting mutual relations* - represent a major, specific social benefit of doing good. Love is the bond of perfection, says the Apostle Paul (Col 3:14), and all human experience, as well as the research in contemporary behavioral sciences, confirms this. Moreover, positive human bonds represent the most important aspect of the feeling of fulfillment, in other words of what we call, with some caution, happiness.¹¹ Reiterated positive interactions create attachment between people, and there exists no other way to obtain them. Obviously, there are countless forms of positive interactions, with their degrees of closeness / distance in their temporal course, but what is specific to each is the very form of coming near, by reducing distances, both moral (knowledge, trust) and physical. Of course, there is no complete correlation between the two types of closeness, one does not automatically involve the other or to the same extent. There are situations of distant friendship and close adversity, but, as we have seen, these are not the rule.

At the same time, it must be admitted how necessary good deeds from a distance can be, in the form of philanthropy or charity in a systematic and organized sense, carried out through established institutions and associations, private and public, governmental and non-governmental, through material or only financial donations, with the most diverse beneficiaries, from individuals and small groups, to institutions and communities, to world-class organizations (WHO, for example). The role of these actions in improving the lives of many of our fellow people cannot be underestimated, but they do not possess the capacity to nurture real bonds, other than perhaps among those who are practicing them directly.

On returning to the present circumstance of the pandemic, it is to be noted that the very submission to the rule of distancing is morally ambiguous: though it can be a form of doing good, it can at the same time reflect preoccupation for the personal interest. Let us admit that it could simply be the observance of the Golden Rule, "Don't do unto others what you don't want them to do to you!" But does this rule suffice in the service of the *common good*? Is it enough for the proving of social *solidarity* in absence of which, without any doubt, we cannot overcome such a severe situation?¹² What we surely need in such a crisis is not just mutual protection by wearing a mask and physical distancing - not social, as it has unhappily been called -, and not just plenty valuable material resources and know-how that must and can be shared from a distance, but also forms of actual, really *heroic* closeness - such as the "first line" professions. Also, not in the least, by and large we are in dire need of two fruits yielded by human connections, namely *trust* and *responsibility* towards others. Where do we get these from, how do they appear?¹³



Who produces prosociality?

Whether the Samaritan approaches the anonymous victim, or keeps his distance - because he can ask for someone else who will do it for him - along with his compassion, he will also prove *confidence* (by which he overcomes the fear of being pranked, staged, ambushed, treated with ingratitude or any other not quite impossible form of personal loss), and also *responsibility* (his engagement for as long as it takes for the victim to reach safety and regain a future). But how are these things explained? Is his act of coming close to an anonymous person, whomever that might be there or, on the contrary, his avoiding contact, from the same motivation of doing good, on the prerequisite of his trust in the promptness and heroism of the rescue services, merely an instantaneous, spontaneous, sudden act?

In its negative formulation quoted above, the Golden Rule alone cannot reveal anything in this regard. On the other hand, its affirmative wording, mentioned by Jesus, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31), raises the same question: how to explain the willingness to do good with the risk of not being rewarded or even of losing? The answer is obvious, simple, and at hand. It relies on learning and practicing social *rapprochement*, starting with the basic forms that are the family ties. The positive, repeated, and reciprocal interactions that bind the members of a family, creating trust and responsibility, are the roots nourishing the subsequent expansion of such patterns of action out into the wider and more inclusive social spaces. A normal evolution takes place here, from learning the natural attachment to the close loved ones, to the external display of compassion for any fellow human being (and even any fellow creature). Despite claims of older or newer ideologies in support of a universal humanism without distinctions, borders, inequities, etc., for which the family is the matrix of all social unfairness, it must be maintained that compassion, trust, responsibility, even heroism, if necessary, mean to treat an anonymous person like a brother, and not the other way around.¹⁴ From this point of view, social distancing can only truly be a form of solidarity for someone who has the education or, more specifically, the habit of social *rapprochement*. Only in this case, avoiding or not doing harm can become a special form of doing good, and not one of acting in selfishness (one socially well-tempered selfishness, perhaps).

The fact that any crisis is, as its name suggests, a revealer of the true state of the ordinary situation is common knowledge, as can be seen in the context of this current one, too.¹⁵ The things that are now exacerbating the medical problem itself are the *lack* of trust (between citizens, or between them and the authorities), a *lack* of responsibility and solidarity, all the dysfunctions of the social body - at all its levels, local, national, international and global - and it is this collective state of negative affairs that is precisely highlighted by the pandemic nature of the disease. Irrespective of the height of scientific intelligence and no matter how much devotion the "first line" professionals are showing, it is a fact that with these alone we will be unable to fight the numerous social, economic and political problems that we are already experiencing and that will

certainly escalate. We need a form of *social character* aggregated from individual characters. Habits and character are nothing but what Christians call *virtue*, which is impossible to appear out of nothing and instantly. If we already possess them, learned and practiced in many common situations, we will be able to exercise them even more in exceptional situations. The Good Samaritan, aka the pandemic heroes that embody him, are now merely acting out their previously acquired moral virtues.¹⁶

These are truisms, of course, but they can at least draw our attention to the fact that two great resources of social capital and prosocial virtues which are the family and the school, have not been in very bright circumstances in the past years, the first through the mass emigration of parents as a work force in other countries, the second through school dropout, bullying, and an eternal never-ending reform, topped more recently with a delusional promise of the digitalization of general education. The major role played by education in shaping prosocial attitudes that we need so much at any time, and even more in times of crisis, has been widely acknowledged, yet less widely acknowledged has been the *opposite* educational effect as a result of practicing this education from a distance.¹⁷

Moreover, if we take into account the existence of a very wide gap between the prosocial experience of family ties and the compassion or solidarity with anonymous people, no matter the distance, a question arises whether this gap can only be filled by the family group and the school even in better situations. Although essential, both are small and rather particular universes. How does their transcendence in prosocial terms take place? Gradually, as the individual taps into maturity, there will be a greater number of larger social groups the individual will increasingly interact with, like for example the professional groups.¹⁸ These may come along with quite significant opportunities of closeness, yet also with no less significant distancing, governed by principles of efficiency, competition, meritocracy, which usually take precedence over those of friendship or camaraderie (teamwork aims at success, not coexistence; loyalty is required by employer from employee, while less is required from the other direction, if any at all).

A role for the Church

There are larger forms of community than family, more lasting than school and more supportive than professional groups, in which relationships have the unconditional character of a brotherhood, virtues are learned and practiced together and the purpose of coexistence transcends both self-interest and individual performance. These are the *families of families*, the parish communities. I will utter in the same breath that these parishes ought to be and are expected to be as such. The group of Jesus' disciples, the communities of the early Church, the monastic communities of all times, up to the present day are all in specific ways, what we are calling theologically "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27), a community of life and destiny through communion (*koinonia*) of faith, sacrament, asceticism and morality with their Creator and Savior and with one another. Their character closed as it is inside doctrinal and

denominational boundaries (*disciplina arcana*) should not limit their prosocial role, but rather amplify it. Amidst hostile political and religious contexts, the first centuries of Christianity stood witness to the practice on a large scale of the original, trans-parochial meaning of closeness from the Good Samaritan parable, embodied in philanthropy granted to all those in need, regardless of their identity and condition.¹⁹

It is not the place here to unravel this subject in detail, yet the ecclesiological crisis that Christian communities experienced during the quarantine period and after that, manifested in the prohibition of participation in liturgical assemblies, which had its considerable reverberations into the public space of interaction (being reflected, among others, in the relations between practicing Christian citizens and non-practitioners or atheists and state authorities), is also an expression of the concentration of normative practices of Christian identity almost exclusively on religious services, to the detriment of daily charitable actions. These deeds, practiced intra- and extra-parochially, considered good, meritorious, recommendable, in theory even seen as conditions for salvation, are still seen as coming second after the participation in the formal worship,

thus not forms of communion with Christ, although they are no less real and indispensable (according to Matthew 25: 31-46).²⁰ In turn, the reserve manifested by the secular state towards faith-based philanthropy, observable in the efforts of the former to develop merely a system of professionalized social services, distanced from the beneficiaries, largely ignoring the subsidiary value of Christian associations and underfinancing them, only reduces the prosocial impact of the most important meso-social community which is the ecclesiastical one.²¹ To this is added the explicitly hostile attitude of non-religious groups in the civil society, especially the press, missing no opportunity to lessen the Church's role and achievements in this field, or most often sheerly ignoring them. For many of our contemporaries, perhaps, the Church belongs to a bygone era; precisely, one in which the twilight of duty had not yet occurred.²² The parable of the Good Samaritan has long ceased to be a common cultural and moral asset and does not seem to have a secular equivalent. Appeals to public virtue through private sacrifices are more than welcome in times of pandemic, only they sound inadequate in an otherwise Mandevillian society.²³

Note:

1. As trivial as it may seem, we can notice that our interactions take place permanently within distances. Except for intrauterine life and Siamese brethren, a separation, and therefore a spatial distance, is constitutive of both our identity and our relationships.
2. Other formulas: „because it protects you”; „Because the danger has not passed”; „Because I do not neglect the effect of infection”; „Because I choose life”; „So as not to waste everyone's effort.” All references to realities concern the situation in Romania.
3. For cooperation, see, e.g., Martin A. Nowak and Sarah Coakley, eds., *Evolution, Games and God: The Principle of Cooperation* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2013). Plato, in the *Republic*, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, in *De homini opificio*, addressed these issues.
4. Altriciality, as opposed to precocity, is the dependence of newborns on adults to survive; neoteny is very slow maturation, with the preservation of early features into adulthood. For their role in the development of human intelligence, see Steven T. Piantadosi, and Celeste Kidd, „Extraordinary intelligence and the care of infants,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 25 (May 2016): 6874-6879; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1506752113>.
5. See Ann E. Bigelow and Lela Rankin Williams. “To have and to hold: Effects of physical contact on infants and their caregivers.” *Infant Behavior & Development* 61 (November 2020): 101494; <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2020.101494>; Carissa J. Cascio, David Moore, and Francis McGlone, “Social touch and human development,” *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience* 35 (February 2019): 5-11; <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2018.04.009>.
6. For a broader perspective, see Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012). With a probative value *a contrario* we can invoke the negative emotions, which we feel the more unpleasant as they contradict a closer approach. See about social capital and the role of the two types of interactions, Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).
7. The parable continues to arouse interest and new exegetical efforts nowadays. For the patristic tradition of interpretation, see Kyriakos Stavrianos, “The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Patristic Thought,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 57, no. 1 (2012): 29-48. For a contemporary reading, see Akiyama, Kengo, *The love of neighbour in ancient Judaism: the reception of Leviticus 19: 18 in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Book of Jubilees, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 91-205.
8. Similarly, also, to decisions regarding the use of insufficiently validated experimental treatments, such as the use of hydroxychloroquine. The «conflict of duties», as the case is called in ethical theories, is the order of the day in the pandemic, as elective case triage proves it. Utilitarianism and deontology have once again shown their limits. I plead here for an ethic of virtue, according to the Christian tradition.
9. There are street posts that thank frontline professionals.
10. For example, Simone Weil, although, on the other hand, she criticizes the idea of impersonal justice; see the reference to our parable in her “Last Thoughts”, in Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 2009), 98; see also Wolfgang Palaver, “Parochial Altruism and Christian Universalism. On the Deep Difficulties to Create Solidarity without Outside Enemies”, in Paul Dumouchel and Reiko Gotoh, eds. *Social Bonds as Freedom: Revisiting the Dichotomy of the Universal and the Particular* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 153-173.
11. See, George E. Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience. The Men of the Harvard Grant Study* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), on the largest longitudinal study of human development (started in 1938).
12. For instance, see Radu Rizoiu, “Ce ție nu-ți place altuia nu-i face: Despre regula de aur în pandemie” [„What you don't like don't do to someone



- else: About the golden rule during pandemic”, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.contributors.ro/ce-tie-nu-ti-place-altuia-nu-i-face-despre-regula-de-aur-in-pandemie/>.
13. On the role of trust, see Daniel Devine, et al. „Trust and the Coronavirus Pandemic: What are the Consequences of and for Trust? An Early Review of the Literature.” *Political Studies Review* (August 2020): <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1478929920948684>.
 14. According to the famous theory of John Rawls, the creation of a system of social justice based on fairness precisely presupposes such anonymization. An application of his „veil of ignorance” in this crisis, in Leslie Francis, „Covid and the Veil of Ignorance”, accessed October 5, 2020, <https://www.philosophytalk.org/blog/covid-and-veil-ignorance>. The difficulties of a universalist humanism are examined by Pierre Manent in *Cours familier de philosophie politique* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), the chapter on “La religion de l’humanité”. On the contemporary challenges to the family, see Mark J. Cherry, *Sex, family, and the culture wars* (London: Routledge, 2017).
 15. Virgiliu Gheorghe, „Turnesolul. Covid-19 sau despre boala egoismului” [“The litmus. COVID-19 or the illness of selfishness”], accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/TURNESOLUL-,-Covid-19-sau-despre-boala-egoismului-162760/>.
 16. See Pol Campos-Mercade, et al. «Prosociality predicts health behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic.» *University of Zurich, Department of Economics, Working Paper 346* (2020); <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3604094>, which states: “prosociality is a stable, long-term predictor of policy-relevant behaviors, suggesting that the impact of policies on a population may depend on the degree of prosociality. “An equally important role is played by the virtues in question in relation to serious moral issues whose impact on mental health cannot be neglected, both during and after the pandemic; see Borges, Lauren M., et al. “A contextual behavioral approach for responding to moral dilemmas in the age of COVID-19.” *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science* 17 (July 2020): 95-101; <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jchs.2020.06.006>, which propose the application of a strategy based on solidarity in small groups, developed in Paul WB, Atkins, David Sloan Wilson, and Steven C. Hayes, *Prosocial: using evolutionary science to build productive, equitable, and collaborative groups*, (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2019). Obviously, a natural precedent and model for them remains the family.
 17. See Mircea Platon, “La ce bun școala în vreme de ciumă” [“What need for the school in Plague time”], în *Contemporanul*, ediție on-line, accesat Octombrie 10, 2020, <https://www.contemporanul.ro/polemice/la-ce-bun-scoala-in-vreme-de-ciuma.html>. The Romanian Ministry of Education and Research has just launched a campaign for students to promote wearing a mask; see Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, “Învăță să salvezi vieți” [Learn how to save lives] <https://www.edu.ro/invata-sa-salvezi-vieti/>. On the general situation of Romanian school education over the last three decades, see Mircea Platon, *Deșcolarizarea României. Scopurile, cârțile și arhitecții reformei învățământului românesc*. [Romania’s unschooling. The goals, the moles, and the architects of the Romanian education reform.] (București: Editura Ideea Europeană, 2020).
 18. We cannot ignore the highly prosocial role of the associations specific to civil society. They have grown in our country over the last decades, but I believe they are far from being a sufficient social capital resource for the current crisis; many of them have more or less declared political agendas, and are engaged in the “cultural wars”.
 19. The borderless philanthropy of early Christians was a serious reason for the spread of the faith, as Emperor Julian the Apostate acknowledges with indignation. In his letter to the pagan hierarch Arsacius (362 AD), Julian states: „It is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galilaeans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us. Teach those of the Hellenic faith to contribute to public service of this sort, and the Hellenic villages to offer their first fruits to the gods; and accustom those who love the Hellenic religion to these good works by teaching them that this was our practice of old”, in Julian, *Letters. Epigrams. Against the Galilaeans. Fragments*, Wilmer C. Wright trans., Loeb Classical Library 157 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), 70-71. Undoubtedly, contemporary Western philanthropy has Christian origins. For the Byzantine contribution, see Demetrios J. Constantelos, *Byzantine philanthropy and social welfare*, rev. ed. (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1991).
 20. I have argued this issue in Sebastian Moldovan, “Pentru regenerarea parohiei rurale” [“How to regenerate the rural parishes”], în *Satul românesc: vatră a plămădirii, păstrării și promovării ființei naționale și a credinței ortodoxe. Simpozion național*, București: Basilica, 2019), 329-350.
 21. Unfortunately, the lack of daily charity practice, as well as the way in which sometimes doing good seems to be a good business, contributes, in turn, to the distrust of the population and the authorities in Christians and the Church.
 22. Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le crépuscule du devoir: l'éthique indolore des nouveaux temps démocratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
 23. Empirical research suggests so far that the results of these calls appear to be very modest; for the USA, see Sophia L. Pink, et al. „Short Messages Encouraging Compliance with COVID-19 Public Health Guidelines Have Minimal Persuasive Effects.” *PsyArXiv* (August 10, 2020); <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/g93zw> (working paper, not peer reviewed). At the same time, prosocial message framing seems to have a greater influence than highlighting one’s own interest; see Jordan Jillian, Erez Yoeli, and David Rand. “Don’t get it or don’t spread it? Comparing self-interested versus prosocially framed COVID-19 prevention messaging.” *PsyArXiv Preprints* (September 2020); <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/yuq7x>. Of course, various forms of paternalism can be used, from the milder to the harshest, but the more effective, the greater the risk of an Orwellian kind of solidarity.

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