



Special Issue on
Coronavirus
Christian Reflections and Responses

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Editorial: Courage, Consolation and Compassion in Times of Coronavirus

Pope Francis has been very close to those acutely suffering from Coronavirus and COVID-19. He has been offering prayers for deliverance from the deadly sickness. On March 27, 2020 at his “*Urbi et orbi*” (“to the City and to the World”) Blessing, he meditated on the calming of the storm from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 4:35-41).

On Monday, March 30, 2020, the Pope’s intention was “for the many people who are not succeeding in coping and remain in fear because of the pandemic.” Further, the “Easter People,” could not celebrate this joyful event.

UN Secretary General António Guterres has warned that the current coronavirus outbreak is the biggest challenge for the world since World War II. He said it could bring a recession “that probably has no parallel in the recent past”.

His warning comes amid dire predictions about the possible economic impact of measures imposed to fight the virus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome CoronaVirus 2,” or SARS-CoV-2.

As of April 9, 2020, it has affected 15,11,104 and tragically 88,338 people over the whole world, with their dreams, stories, hopes and anxieties have died. In India, there are 5274 confirmed cases with 149 deaths. It is tragic. Painful.

In this context, we want to reflect on this tragic and painful topic from our Christian faith and paschal feast. The aim of these essays is not to sow panic or depression, but to evoke

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courage, hope and compassion. It must be acknowledged that these essays are not based on the latest scientific findings, for which we recommend the readers to use reliable scientific and medical sources. Sadly, there are so many myths and fake news promoted on this occasion.

Respecting the scientific development and hoping that a reliable vaccine may be soon discovered, these articles urge the Christian faithful to be open to God’s grace and to trust in Him fully, since He is our only Hope.

The articles in this volume are roughly divided into the seven last words of Jesus, reflecting the present moment of Paschal Mystery. The first eight article reflect on the quarantine, getting in touch with oneself and related themes. Though it is truly challenging task for many families, the lockdown invites us to be in touch with our innermost self and to recall spiritually the assurance of Jesus: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43)

The next set of articles look on the scientific basis of coronavirus and the harm that we have done to mother earth. While acknowledging the miracle that science and technology have been for humanity, we need to acknowledge that we misuse this power to exploit the earth. In this section, we can listen to the consoling words of Jesus: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Lk 23:34). This is followed by four articles connected with plague and epidemic in the history of humanity. The millions of people who have died in numerous plagues should remind us of Jesus entrusting all these dead and suffering people to Mary, just as he entrusted John to her. So, we listen to Jesus, “Woman, behold, your son” (Jn 19:26).

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In the fourth section, we deal with the numerous lessons we can learn from this tragic corona experience. Hopefully these lessons will change our life-style and lead us different ways of fulfilling our expectations. Hopefully we shall learn to live as brothers and sisters. This reminds us of Jesus' words: "I thirst" (Jn 19: 28). The next section deal with God and how we experience God in these agonising moments. In spite of our unbelief, struggle and pessimism, we do find courage to surrender ourselves to this God, who we believe loves us unconditionally. Thus, we can make Jesus' prayer our own: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23:46).

Still there is no escape from fear, angst and a sense of rejection. Even when we look a the crucified Lord, we feel abandoned and helpless. Hence, we make our own the anguish of Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 17:46).

In the concluding section with faith and trust we say it is finished or fulfilled, in ways not fully known to us. We try to derive hope and discern the will of God in all these terrible experiences of suffering, angst, abandonment and loss. We want to acknowledge that though we feel helpless, we are not hopeless, since HE walks with us! "It is accomplished." (Jn 19:30).

The article in this volume urges the readers to take the Coronavirus threat seriously, but not get into panic or depression. It urges caution and care, but not dread, since we can always trust in the Risen Lord, who alone is our hope.

May this Pascal Feast bring us abundance of joy and hope based on the courage, consolation that we draw from our faith! May our living faith make us truly compassionate, especially to those affected by COVID-19. Our prayers for all of you.

The Editor



Home Quarantine as Home-Coming

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Home quarantine as a precaution to protect oneself from deadly pandemic covid-19 is indeed a unique opportunity for humans to home-coming. The metaphor 'Home-Coming' can be understood, both literally and symbolically. Home-coming literally means that we humans have gone too far in different crossroads in search of wealth that is transitory, social recognition that is fleeting, and the pleasures of the world that are momentary. Symbolically, home-coming could be understood as the need humans feel to return to their original home, their original self or return to the 'inner' self. The reason behind this is our obsession with 'activism,' always seeking ways and means solely in the direction of profit motive. But this overemphasis on outward actions can lead to adverse side-effects. What we need today is a good blend between these two extreme poles, one complementing the other. Most of the spiritual Gurus time and again have warned that authentic spirituality ought to deepen our journey in both directions. Henry Nouwen has rightly pointed out that: "Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self." The sudden eruption of covid-19 sweeping the entire world, irrespective of all human made boundaries like developed or underdeveloped, rich or poor, without caste, creed and religion has taught us many hard lessons. No corner of the world is untouched and no life is unaffected by this pandemic.

The whole of humanity is facing unprecedented challenges. So, the question is: What lessons can we learn from 'Home Quarantine' during this time of covid -19? What are the opportunities we are exposed to?

From 'Hybridized Self' to 'Inner Self'

Home quarantine due to Covid-19 is a call to "authentic existence." Human existence is an on-going process. It is a journey that opens itself multi-directionally, a journey to oneself, to the other and to the Divine. As a result, humans are always on the process of refining themselves in a creative openness to oneself, to the other and the Divine. In other words, humans are called for a cosmic and borderless openness, seeing the whole cosmos as divinely saturated (Puthenpurackal). Authentic existence can be both a *call* and a *response*. It is a call to be finitely free and a response to be authentically oneself. But humans are lost in the world of "hybridization" (Puthenpurackal). Hybridization is understood not as the formation of hybrids by cross-breeding between different species. Metaphorically 'hybridization' refers to the insatiable craving humans have for *progress* in the exterior, leading to gradual *regress* in the interior. The rapid scientific and technological progress has led humans to greater heights but has failed to make them humane. Hybridization in this sense has shifted our focus from what is essential and original to what is outer and fleeting/transitory. As a result of hybridization humans think that their lives are *bettered* but they are in fact *altered*, distancing from the primordial. 'Hybridization' or progress in the exterior has created 'hybrid-humans,' pushing them further into their individual comfort zones, regressing in the 'inner' self, like the personal dimension, the social dimension, and the moral dimension.

It is a golden opportunity to return from one's masked hybrid self to one's primordial unmasked self, the home-coming to the 'inner' of the humans.

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In other words, we have given top priority to what philosopher Gabriel Marcel calls the '*having-dimension*,' rather than the '*being-dimension*' of humans. Home-Quarantine at this juncture due to the fast engulfing deadly disease Covid-19 can be such a golden opportunity to return from one's masked hybrid self to one's primordial unmasked self, the home-coming to the 'inner' of the humans.

Home Quarantine' is an opportunity and an invitation to delve deep into ourselves, be saturated by the Divine and reach out to others.

From 'Activism' to 'Silence and Solitude'

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone," says French philosopher Blaise Pascal (2018, 139 "Diversion," 1670). Pascal clearly states that we humans are avoiding stillness and solitude. Without entertainment, distraction and diversion humans are forced to be alone with the inevitable 'truth' of existence, namely, that life is tough and humans are bound to be miserable or meant to suffer. It is so instinctive in us that we dread boredom and there is an urge to immerse our attention in external things than dwell on what is inside. In other words, what Pascal says is, we fear the 'silence of existence.'

What I believe is that the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease Covid-19 and the home quarantine can be such a 'Pascalian Moment,' a great spiritual opportunity to sit quietly alone in our homes without distraction, and listen to the ego's incessant chirping about how restless and miserable this existence is. Could we say that the pandemic Covid-19 which has put the entire world in a complete lockdown is a call to cease senseless activity and a warning to spend more time as individuals going inward and grow in solidarity with the

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humanity? Could we say that Pascal is warning us against chasing after futuristic goals and our ceaseless craving to amass wealth, striving for power and prosperity that will not save us? Can we decide to put down our electronic devices, our brain numbing activities and be alone? All the cravings, the gadgets and the places we go to seek ‘divergence’ are completely locked down due to Covid -19. Amidst our fears of

this pandemic, we are called for a time of introspection, a time to rustle with the deepest questions of life and learn the art of silence and solitude. Pascal’s observation about our inability to sit quietly in a room by ourselves holds true: we are connected to everything else except ourselves.

From ‘Egoism’ to ‘Altruistic Actions’

Home-Quarantine also provides a golden platform for *altruistic actions*, which requires sacrifice on the part of the compassionate giver. It involves extending assistance to the other without expecting a benefit or a reward. It is to see the other as the legitimate goal in the giving. A well-known Biblical story is the Good Samaritan, the man from Samaria who generously gave his time and resource to the wounded victim. This story underscores the concept of sacrifice which lies at the heart of altruistic actions. Sacrifice is not only about material goods, but includes more elusive and highly valued social goods like interpersonal relationships, inclusion of those excluded of the society, help and listening ear to the migrant workers and the least of the society. Thus, ‘Home Quarantine’ is an opportunity and an invitation to delve deep into ourselves, be saturated by the Divine and reach out to others.

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Making Sense of Our Experiences of Solitude and Loneliness

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In the recent lock-down because of Corona virus epidemic, large numbers of people in most part of the world were forced to confine themselves to their homes. Going by the evidences in the social media, this confinement was not all easy for many people, to say the least. In part, this involuntary isolation caused considerable distress because we are not used to such seclusion. This extraordinary health crisis triggered large number of reflections not only about the virus and preventive measures, but also about the meaning of life and death. However, this crisis situation and the ensuing confinement also produced considerable amount of humour. One particular form of humour focused on the funny side of the forced isolation. Several people posted videos of how this forced confinement is affecting them in creative and humorous manner. For example, as they reach the limits of boredom, some start counting the staircase steps, chairs, tables, electric switches, bulbs, and tube lights in the house. Others start calculating the number of hair in the toothbrush, counting the teeth in the comb, and measuring the time takes for the fan to stop completely.

Humour apart, there is a grain of truth that it is not easy to be alone for a long period of time. One of the reasons for this is rooted in our social nature. Bible contains profound insights into our social nature. We find such insights right in the first

chapter of Genesis which describes the story of creation. After various acts of creation, we are told that 'It was good.' It is repeated at least 7 times. Perhaps the authors of Genesis want to communicate the basic goodness of creation. In the Second chapter God creates Adam, the first man. Then in verse 18 we read: "Then the Lord God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone.'" The very first thing described as being 'not good' is being 'alone.' He creates a companion, Eve or woman. This is a beautiful way of describing our relatedness and our social nature.

Both solitude and loneliness are related to our social nature. Though there is a tendency to confuse solitude and loneliness, we need to note that our experiences of solitude and loneliness tend to be different.

Both solitude and loneliness are related to our social nature. Though there is a tendency to confuse solitude and loneliness, we need to note that our experiences of solitude and loneliness tend to be different. In this short article, I would like to focus on the differences between solitude and loneliness and the dynamics and forms of loneliness.

Solitude and Loneliness

There are differences between our experience of loneliness and solitude. And it is important to note this difference. Loneliness is not the same thing as being alone. We can be alone, still not feel lonely. So a sense of solitude is not the same as loneliness. In fact, a lack of solitude can bring us a sense of loneliness. We all need solitude at least sometimes. Going by the New Testament data, it would appear that Jesus did embrace solitude. For example, in Mt 14: 23 we read: "After he dismissed the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone."

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In our solitude we meet ourselves. It is here that we meet our true selves. And for many, it can be an experience a little unsettling. But this meeting our true selves at a depth level is also the condition for our growth and maturity. We all need a little 'time out' and a quiet time and space for ourselves. It is time to discover ourselves, to discover our innermost self. It is also a space to grow as mature persons. This is a temporary withdrawal which has nothing to do with how you get along with others. You are not afraid of it; you are not lost in it. When you are in solitude, you are alone. In solitude I am by myself, but I am not lonely.

When we are unable to relate, when we are not able to belong, when we are not accepted, when we are not loved and when we are unable to love, we feel within us a sense of being 'disconnected.' Loneliness is basically our experience of being disconnected.

In solitude, we do not experience a sense of pain or loss of relationships as we do in loneliness. Solitude is a voluntary withdrawal which is temporary. Moreover, unlike loneliness, solitude is the effect of the choice that we make. We do not have many choices regarding the factors contributing to loneliness.

But the lonely ones may attend so many parties, they may get phone calls often, and they may be very popular. And they still feel lonely. We can be surrounded by people, and still be lonely. One can have big social circles, and still can be very lonely. Another may not have big social circles, and yet may not experience loneliness. Often it could be the case that lonely people tend to run around hectically in their effort to mask a deep sense of loneliness.

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Dynamics and Forms of Loneliness

Loneliness is different from solitude. One of the ways to understand the experience of loneliness is by looking at it as an experience of 'disconnect.' We can ask: what does this disconnect mean? What does this experience of disconnect consists of?

All of us have certain basic human needs such as our need to love and to be loved, to relate to others, to belong to groups, institutions, religion or to other people, to accept others and to be accepted by others. Thus, when we are able to relate in a meaningful way, when we are able to belong to other, to traditions and institutions, when we are accepted by others and when we accept others in a meaningful way, when we are able to love in a meaningful way, we experience some of 'connection.' When these things are present, we feel that we are somehow 'connected.'

On the other hand, when we are unable to relate, when we are not able to belong, when we are not accepted, when we are not loved and when we are unable to love, we feel within us a sense of being 'disconnected.' Loneliness is basically our experience of being disconnected. Loneliness is the feeling of not really mattering to anyone, of not being significant, of being isolated, of being alone in the sense of not being important to anyone.¹

Loneliness is not only difficult, but it is also a condition difficult to explain. The main reason for this could be that there are various types of loneliness or sources of loneliness. We shall mention six types of loneliness here, though by no means this list is exhaustive.

Separation from Other People: There is one form of loneliness which results from the separation from other people. There can be many reasons for such separation. It could be separation from people and groups with whom we have worked closely. They had meant much to us. Now they are not with us. Separation could be in the form of death of loved ones. Sometimes, the separation can

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result of deep hurt or abuse. They find it difficult to trust others because they have been taken advantage of or exploited. Or it could be rejection of love. Or it could be our inability to love others in a meaningful way. It could also result from non-acceptance from others.



Alienation from One's Own Self: One of the devastating forms of loneliness is the alienation from one's own self. It is also very destructive because there is a loss of self and a loss of meaning. There can be several reasons for this form of self-alienation. It could be because a deep sense of guilt in our life. The loneliness of guilt can be at times terrible. We have done some wrong and we feel guilty about it. Guilt is ultimately the anger directed against oneself. Often many of us feel trapped in guilt, eating away our peace and a sense of well-being. We are alone with the burden of our guilt. Sometimes people feel self-alienated because of a combination of reasons: it could be because of a lack of belongingness, a sense of failure in life or it could be a sense of rejection. Some of these feelings can be diffused and often vague but leading gradually to a sense of loneliness.

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Loneliness resulting from our Work: Sometimes, those who pioneer certain type of work also may feel a sense of loneliness. Often, this can result from a sense of not being understood; it can come from a lack of support that one might feel in starting something new. Some letters of pioneering missionaries like Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili reflect this form of loneliness. At other times, sheer volume of work involved, and a lack of being alone in our work also can result in loneliness.

Existential Loneliness: In spite of love and communion, there remains the realization that ultimately in some way, I am alone. I may have the support and help but still I face my life alone. To be lonely is part of being human. That is the existential loneliness. In this sense, some degree of loneliness cannot be avoided. Even married people feel lonely at times; man and woman remain alone even in the most intimate union.² We can try to run away from it, go to different parties or we can even pretend that it does not exist. But our existential loneliness remains as part of our life.

Cultural Alienation/Loneliness: A person may live in a culture different from one's own. One may speak the language of that particular culture but still feel alienated. This can be a common experience of religious who work in a different culture. We are neither rooted in our own culture, nor in the adopted culture. Often we do not feel quite connected in the adopted culture. Many of us feel a sense of cultural displacement. As a result many of us seek to connect with our own ethnic and cultural groups. Here, we need to note that this form of alienation results from a lack of belonging to cultural tradition.

Loneliness of the Elderly: For many elderly people, loneliness can come in the form of shrinking circle of friends. It is also the realization that we are not in a position to expand that circle again. We see people of our age group slowly disappearing from existence. Suddenly we see those who are close to us are not with us anymore. Sometimes many old people feel that they are not wanted. All these can add up to the experience of loneliness experienced by the elderly people. Some of us may grow old gracefully; others may not be so lucky.

So, there are various sources of loneliness and forms of loneliness. And the experience of loneliness differs from person to person.

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Much of it depends on our personality traits and up-brining and our mental make-up.

Conclusion

As with our differing experiences of loneliness, our capacity to cope with loneliness also differs. Some of us are better equipped with it while others may not be able to cope with it. All the same, it is never too late to learn something about loneliness and in that process, we can also learn something about ourselves. Whatever the case, prolonged loneliness can have its effects on our lives and on our work. Loneliness often is part of being human and there may not be simple solutions to deal with it. Distractions can diminish the pain of loneliness but it does not meet the problem at its root. We can ignore loneliness – but it will come back with a vengeance. So, we need to face our experience of loneliness and try to deal with it as best as we can. Often, our loneliness can be an invitation and challenge. It can be a valuable opportunity for our growth. Some problems in our lives cannot be resolved fully and completely. Loneliness is one of them. So, we learn to live with them, to make best out of them. It can be an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and our shadows.



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¹ Robert Lauder, *Loneliness is for Loving* (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1978) p. 10.

² Paul Tillich, *The Boundaries of Our Being* (London & Glasgow: Collins, 1973) p. 16.



Lessons from the Corona Moment of Humanity

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The globe has stopped for a virus. It sounds crazy but it is real. While we are in lockdown and practicing social distancing to fight COVID-19, it is also a time to think and reflect. Distanciation is special to human. We can stand out of the stream of life and still look at it. We can mark a distance without being distant to life. Distanciation is our ability to reflect. But we cannot stay in the cave of our distanciations. We have to return back and face the immanence of life. We transcend life only to return with direction and vigour. The corona moment of humanity that we are facing is one such important time of distanciation. It challenges us to reflect and face life with serenity, compassion, and courage. Let begin this reflection with the basics. Distanciation takes us temporarily apart from the world. We transcend the hustle and bustle of life and look at it with

Our body plays a great role in shaping our experience of the world. We can see all bodies under a background but we cannot see our own body. Human experience of the world is carnal. We know the world through our body.

critical eyes. Unfortunately, transcendental mode of thinking is mostly linear and hierarchical and we begin to believe that we are completely apart from the world. The corona moment of humanity is driving us back into the stream of life. It is teaching us that we are not entirely different. We are worldly and bodily and as such are vulnerable as any living organism.

Our Bodily Life and Distanciation

Let's delve on this levelling down of humanity brought about forcefully by the prevailing corona moment. It challenges us to adopt an immanent mode of thinking. Immanent mode of thinking is mostly non-hierarchical and non-linear and open possibilities in all directions. It teaches us that we part of the world that we falsely think is apart from us. The world is not really apart from us. Immanent mode of thing can assist us to understand our immersion into the world. Like a fish that is in the ocean but may not know the ocean as one fable tells us, we too forget that we are immersed in a world. We are beings-in-the-world and not out of it. This is like the eyes that enable us to see the world but we cannot see our own eyes seeing the world. Indeed, there is no line that separates us and the world. But we cannot live without this marking of distance. We need it for survival. There is a reversal of this in the corona moment. We are firmly reminded that we cannot survive outside our world.

Lessons from the Corona Moment of Humanity

Our body plays a great role in shaping our experience of the world. We can see all bodies under a background but we cannot see our own body. Human experience of the world is carnal. We know the world through our body. We are present to the world through our body. The presence of our body is paradoxical in nature. We experience our body as the most intimate, inescapable, and abiding presence in our lives. But it is essentially characterized by absence. This means our body that essentially assists us to produce or make sense of the experience of our world stays furthest from our

awareness in this entire experience of knowing the world. It is indeed strange that body with which we live and relate to others and the world remains a stranger to us



while it overcomes our estrangement to the world. We relate to the world with a body that is profoundly marked by a corporal absence. In several ways, our carnally produced knowledge of the world is decorporealized. The invisibility of the eyes into its own vision illustrates this fact forcefully. The world is known or thought to be where we are not. This conviction guides our domination of the world. But is the world away from where we are? We are immersed in the world but are not mindfully aware of it. The corona moment by highlighting the vulnerability and fragility of our bodies is bringing us back to our bodily life.

The objectification of the world is possible and is sustained by distanciation that stands between our bodies and the world. It is only through an internal negation of body that we can come to know the world. It is the ecstatic nature of humanity that lets the body become absent to the world and lets us know the world. Perhaps, this gap that we experience in this process has paved a way for the construction of a disembodied lifestyle that is amplified by our technology. It is important, therefore, to listen to our bodies and respect its message. All bodies speak. They have a message for us. The corona moment brings this message loud and clear. We can be really engrossed in the daily routines doing several things but can forget the body that is enabling us to do those things. Maybe we have to listen to the

signals and the cries that our body and that of our loved ones are emitting and find adequate responses

Other Lessons

There are other lessons that we can learn from this corona moment in silence and intense attention. It has truly levelled down humanity. The global lockdown has open possibilities for animals and birds to reclaim their rightful spaces. In the silence that has come as a consequence of lockdown, we can now hear the chirping of the birds, dance of the leaves and flow of the river. Human activity seems to have drowned every other voice on this planet earth. Maybe the corona moment of humanity might arouse eco-concern in us. But there is another important lesson in this levelling of humanity. The dangerous coronavirus does not know all the distinction and divisions that humans have introduced among themselves. The divisive politics, casteism, racism, and marginalization of all forms is seemingly crumbling under the attack of this minute virus. Humanity today is left with a simple option. To save itself it has to save the poor. If the poor are left in lurk to suffer the onslaught coronavirus without adequate food and medicine, it will be suicidal for the rich and the powerful. Coronavirus is here to change the way we live as humans. It is for us to learn our lessons and bring the required change individually and collectively. I stop here not because there is nothing more to say. Immersive thinking in the mode of immanence is not stand-alone thinking. It is a collective thought that brings us back into the stream of life and offers tremendous possibilities to be humans in the world. This thinking has to go on. But it cannot do it without you.

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More Lessons: Quality Time and Boredom

Being locked down and immobilized has its upsides. One can spend quality time with oneself as one is free from the myth of Sisyphus that has set the clock of our life



from morning to night. Now that we have time on our side and no concern about the deadlines of the jobs to be accomplished, we might be confused with the frightening prospect of doing nothing. But we don't have to feel debilitated. There is a lot that one can do with this new flourish of free time. There was a time when we complained about not having enough time when we felt constraints by the things that we had to do and the time that we had at our disposal. Today things have reversed. We have all the time and fewer things to do. But this new condition that finds ourselves is imposed from outside. It has come in a sudden disruptive mode. That is why it is difficult to accept and we all find it to be a great challenge to stay at home and do little or nothing. While there are several things that we can do creatively to wile our time and boredom, it is time to take on the phenomenon of boredom head-on. We have applied our mind's attention to several things but may have not given sufficient attention to this phenomenon that is all around us. This may be another important lesson that we can learn from the corona moment of humanity. To hold our heads with calm serenity, we have to deal with boredom.

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Although no one is dying of boredom, everyone has his/her share of boredom. Boredom is not something that has befallen on us at this time of human distress. It has been there amidst us for a long time. We live in a culture of boredom and at this time we feel it acutely due to this general lock-down. Maybe we have

an opportunity to consider the philosophy of boredom. Boredom is human and has to be critically studied. Today when we have all the leisure in the world and can enjoy the luxury of relaxation and do nothing, the prospect of having nothing to do is producing boredom. Hence, this corona moment of humanity is an opportunity to reflect on boredom that is eating into our life. We really do not have an exact concept of boredom. It is simply a blank label to everything that fails to hold our interest. It might surprise us to know that the boredom that afflicts us today is a recent human invention. It is a product of over rationalization of our society. We are indeed living in a rationalized society that rations us time for everything. We seem to be living always catching up with time to board a bus, train or flight. Some of us are fighting time to reach our office or an appointment with a doctor, engineer, lawyer, etc. This sense of catching up with or fighting the running time has its benefits. It brings efficiency and productivity to our society. It also has its costs. Boredom is one important price that we pay to live on side of the linear notion of passing time.

The inability to catch up with time is one important triggering factor of boredom. Boredom is complex, it is not just lack of mastery over time that produces it there are other factors too. They have to do with the repetition of something. Routinized repetitions produce familiarity and hence there is no novelty, we have to face boredom. Maybe we are facing this situation for now. There is nothing new. Everything seems to be the same. Time today is running slow. We do not have to catch up with it. We have a desire to escape it. We do not like fixations of any kind. But fixations are never abstract. They are different to different people. Boredom, therefore, is an aesthetic condition. It is a matter of likes and dislikes. One can get bored with the same taste of food. Thus, boredom is dynamic, plural and complex and is felt differently by each of us. Here we may have to consider how the desire to see is the mother of all our desires. All desires are scopic. This means all desire is a desire to see. Even a desire to taste a food item is actually

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a desire to see how it tastes. The desire for sex is also a desire to see how it feels. This is why when we are angry we say ‘I will show you or I will see you.’ This desire to see is complex and operates differently in different people. We face boredom when our desire to see cannot animate or likes and dislikes. This is a time when what we like or even dislike begins to become a source of our boredom.

We are not condemned to boredom. We can do something about it. Boredom being an inner-state of mind which shapes our moods can be dealt with effectively. Awareness of what triggers boredom is one way of overcoming boredom. We also have other ways of reframing our minds. Mostly when we are bored, we feel that we have to kill time. This sense can give us signals that we are heading into a condition of boredom. The corona moment of humanity has brought us to the prospect of having to kill time. When we are trapped in this condition, we are not only bored but we bore others.

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Awareness that we have spoken of can come to our rescue in this situation. Such awareness can ignite an understanding that time is a powerful resource but we do not have to catch up with it or fight it when we feel we lack it or have to kill it when we feel we have it in abundance. A reframed mind then can creatively imagine ways of putting up with the surplus time that we have for enjoyable use. This does not mean that boredom will not come catching back at us. It will come back but we will not be enslaved to it. We have the power over it and can

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transform it into enjoyable moments and live happily. Time is open and not closed. There is novelty and surprise for us to enjoy.

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Reinterpreting Social Distancing as Responsibility Anchored in Social Solidarity

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In his message during *Urbi et Orbi* on 27 March 2020, Pope Francis said that the coronavirus pandemic has made us realize that “all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other” (Pope Francis, 2020). During this experience of helplessness, the Lord “invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering” (Pope Francis, 2020). Social solidarity is what is called for at a time when we are morally obliged to practice social distancing. Strange and paradoxical as it may seem, social solidarity and social distancing are two sides of the same coin.

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Solidarity with the Other

Social solidarity begins with the recognition of the other—the other for whom I am responsible as Levinas would say. At the heart of Levinas’ philosophy is the encounter with the Other. For him, human person can fulfil his or her vocation only by leaving his or her self and by the act of entering into relation with the unassimilable otherness of the other. Levinas underlines the self-disinterested character of this relationship,

guided by the need and expectations of the Other. In order to become a subject, the self must accept to be responsible. And as the existence of the subject can only be justified by the Other, this responsibility is what the self assumes for the Other. “Since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is incumbent on me” (Levinas, 1985). For Levinas, the dignity of human person consists above all in this non-transferable responsibility which, in extreme cases, can go as far as shaping the destiny of the Other. He understands the ultimate social relationship as care for the Other, as unconditional responsibility assumed for the Other and as immense solidarity. This solidarity does not crush the human self; on the contrary, it is through this immense solidarity that the human subject appears in his or her irreducible singularity.

Greed for Profit

Unfortunately, driven by the greed of profit, the contemporary society has defied the value of solidarity. Once again Pope Francis succinctly sums up the contemporary lifestyle in the following words: “Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste... we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet.”



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Why and in the name of what, today in the face of a pandemic, should we feel responsible for others and express solidarity with others if we accepted individualism and the “crisis of the social bond” as inevitable in our pursuit of individualistic dreams? In his 1992 essay, the French Philosopher, Gills Lipovetsky warns us that today's society is has opted for a culture promoting hedonistic norms of well-being. Sadly, this is a shared experience of all of us and it paves way for social discrimination. I was appalled by a cartoon in one of the dailies that subtly justified the practice of “untouchability” as a traditional form of wisdom to exercise social distancing. Shameful and dreadful! This is the reason why we need to interpret social distancing as a moral responsibility demanded in the name of social solidarity.

Philosophers have attempted to characterize responsibility. Their effort, far from being located in the abstract universe of ideas, comes from a situation similar to ours in the context of existential crisis. We shall retain three main features in which we shall recognize some major axes of contemporary identity.

Some Major Axes of Identity

1. Willingness: This is the normative meaning of responsibility mentioned by the well-known contemporary thinker, Paul Ricœur (1992), relating responsibility to an action done voluntarily whose consequences can be anticipated. In our present-day scenario, the challenge is to voluntarily choose to give up the pleasures of socializing that may put others' lives in

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peril. Called to practice social distancing is not primarily to protect oneself (though it is not excluded), but to ensure that we do not become carriers of corona virus (covid-19) without even being aware of it as many of us may be asymptomatic of infection. We do not mean to say here that external determinations do not exist, nor do we say that others do not have intelligence to protect themselves, but we voluntarily assume our responsibility for others. This is why certain external determinations or constraints can be silenced so that every individual may assume responsibility for the health of others. Assuming responsibility happens voluntarily or willingly and it is with this sense of freedom that our indebtedness to others is offered as a precious gift in this crucial time of pandemic.

2. Fragility: If we can take home a singular narrative from this experience of threatened by pandemic, it is that we humans are fragile and vulnerable despite our pseudo claims on “false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities” (Pope Francis, 2020). It is true that all of us are in the same boat threatened by the tempest of corona pandemic, but there are some who are more fragile and vulnerable than the rest of us. Among such people are the economically poor, migrant daily wage labourers, slum dwellers, displaced refugees, the socially discriminated and politically oppressed. Sadly, in India such groups of people are not only humiliated but also despised. Tons of criticism are levelled against the mass exodus of migrant workers without remorse as though they put our lives at risk. False propaganda is relentlessly spread on social media against certain members of a particular religion as though they strategically planned the spread of corona virus. It is time we realized that we are more responsible for these vulnerable people. This is not the time for political squandering and demeaning divisiveness. According to Ricœur (1992), the term responsibility has taken on the meaning of ensuring the dignity of the other. Once again, this form of responsibility can be realized through socially distancing ourselves from narrow confines of class,

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caste and creed divisions, from condescending false propaganda and from belittling the more vulnerable population with unfounded criticisms. Our own experience of fragility has to foster in us a sense of solidarity with others who are even more fragile than we are.

3. Proximity: The French philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry, Emmanuel Levinas (1985) highlighted this by stating that responsibility arises from the face to face encounter with the other and the ethical challenge posed to the self by the face of the other who is dependent and suffering. This can be understood in the present-day context in two ways. First, it is a moment of grace when we can recognize how much we owe to our families. We can be proximate to our kith and kin who need us always and more so at this time when they may be going through emotional distress and spiritual despair. We who have set wrong priorities of placing wealth over relationship can come to reckon with the fact that what matters ultimately is those who care for us and those whom we care about. Confining ourselves to our homes enables us to rediscover the importance of proximity to our family members coupled our responsibility for them. Secondly it is a moment of recognizing our bonding with the larger human family. Living the experience of interdependence is precisely part of the destiny of being human. Thanks to frontline medical professionals, public service personnel, police officers, and

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Government administrative professionals, we are able to witness the nobility of being proximate to those who are infected with this deadly virus manifesting silently or overtly their dependence on us. Such experience of interdependence is singular, charged with affect and is dense among those who cater to the needs of the suffering other.

Conclusion

We could add to this triple characterization of the contemporary experience of responsibility another theme, which to some



extent echoes Pope Francis' appeal to care for our common home and all species inhabiting it. Jonas (1985) is concerned about the generations to come that they may inherit nature in pristine purity. Contemporary society faces unprecedented risks and new threats. Already in 1999, German social scientist, Ulrich Beck, raised the question of the risks arising from the science-technology duo. In the same vein, we can think of the social risk represented in contemporary society imbued with consumeristic lifestyle and a total disregard for poverty structurally sustained. Amidst gloom, there is a ray of hope that we are capable of alternate lifestyle without polluting our common home with the emission of excessive carbon dioxide generated by fuel consumption of vehicles, without contaminating the water sources and vast oceans, thus letting the birds sing, dolphins dance and other mammals breathe freedom. Like other viruses before, we shall withstand the brutal hold of corona virus over us, but what is important is to pledge that our sense of responsibility for others – human and other species – be anchored in the experience of solidarity that would not fade away with the extinction of corona virus.

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Being with Oneself as God-Encounter

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I have never used the term ‘quarantine’ till recent times, as far as I remember. When I first read in the newspaper, I had to turn the pages of my dictionary in order to have right comprehension. However, I learnt that it is been an ancient practice for years. In 1377, the first law on medical isolation was passed by the Great Council, when the plague was rapidly running European countries. The law prescribed isolation for 30 days, called a ‘trentino’. Subsequently, many countries adopted similar laws to protect the people. When the duration of isolation was enhanced to 40 days, the name also changed to ‘quarantine’ by adopting the Latin ‘quadraginta’, which referred to a 40-day detention placed on ships. *(I quote from an article published on the center page of a newspaper: The Hindu, April 3, 2020).*

Though the terms ‘quarantine’ and ‘isolation’ are used interchangeably, but they convey two different meanings. Quarantine is imposed to separate and restrict the movement of persons, who may have been exposed to infectious disease, but not yet known to be ill. But Isolation is a complete separation from others of a person known or reasonably believed to infected with communicable diseases. However, these terms did not create any fuss as far as it was a practice of hospitals and homes. But, now, it has become a world-wide practice. We cannot claim it to be one of the scientific practices as it is found in every culture evolved from a practical reasoning.

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A Personal Story

As a school boy, I was affected with smallpox. I was quarantined, isolated; and quiet unfortunate that It was during the time of Christmas vacation. But, my feeling within was of passion week. I yelled at people who visited me to greet me ‘Merry Christmas’. Perhaps, my reaction had reasons; as I had to fight with loneliness, fight with pain; these reasons had developed in me a kind of restlessness which made me feel unloved. Time to time I started to wet my pillow with my tears. It shakes me even today, if I think about it. But now, I can understand that given my age, maturity, time and mood in which I fell sick, it is quite natural to suffer from such feelings.

I realized that it is a precious time given to me to be with oneself and to go within oneself.

But, today, I am surprised that I seem to share the same feelings of then, even though not infected with the disease of COVID-19. I was in Maharashtra, which has the highest number of cases. No worries, no tension, I was at peace in Pune and all along my journey, till I reached Dindigul, Tamil Nadu. The moment, we entered our Jesuit Community, we were quarantined. That developed in us a kind of fear and restlessness. First of all, back from Pune, we had to fight the heat for a day or two. Secondly, Beschi Jesuit Community is said to be our mother house of the province. Almost, every one of us love to come and stay at Beschi till we get old. Obviously, we don’t like stay close to cemetery, when grow old; we might tend to count the days. But this particular stay at Beschi has been very different. I am at Beschi but I am not is the paradox of the situation. I couldn’t enter into the main stream of the community. I usually, enjoy meeting elderly fathers; but couldn’t. I love to see novice moving ahead with regular routine. But everything seemed the other way; no games,

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complete distancing, I seem to dislike my own smell with the mask business and so on. Though, I could understand the seriousness of the disease, on the other hand, it is mainly to help our elderly fathers to have a sound health; but then, it is was difficult when it comes to within. I had to move on otherwise, my fear and restlessness would lead me towards a summer 'stress'. (I will come back to this stress in few lines.)

Facing the 'Within'

'Late have I realized' was my encounter. It was from there; in that difficulty of facing the 'within', I began to move on. I realized that it is a precious time given to me to be with oneself and to go within oneself. Today, a term called "STRESS" has been widely, introduced to people especially, to the educated crowd. People tend to consider stress as psychological disorder. Of course, some say that this stress has become business. I acknowledge that I don't have degree to elaborate the term 'stress'. But as far as I understand, stress is the pre-occupations, worries, tensions which stops me from being with myself, going within myself. Thus, we need to get ourselves out of all the that worries us; instills fear in us; bothers us. As we keep ourselves moving in this direction, one will find himself/herself going deeper into oneself. Not alone, but he/she will automatically allow the spirit to guide us towards a greater consciousness. I feel that this is where I encounter the transcendental being within. This is how the time of quarantine evolved into a God-encounter for me.

But it is just a matter of mindfulness and allowing the inner self to retreat. Of course, to be mindful is not just reading a novel. Mindfulness is a difficult task especially, at this time of confusion, fear and restlessness. We cannot give up because our survival is at risk. Science is not able to answer and solve the problems.

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Conclusion

It might sound like guided-meditation or it might seem like defending the heading. If so, it is correct to be in that status, because it is an experience to me and it is an information to the reader. I don't say that we all should enter into retreat mode, by shutting the outside, keeping silence and so on. But it is just a matter of mindfulness and allowing the inner self to retreat. Of course, to be mindful is not just reading a novel. Mindfulness is a difficult task especially, at this time of confusion, fear and restlessness. We cannot give up because our survival is at risk. Science is not able to answer and solve all the problems we face. Yes, it is not because science can only function as it is supposed to. It cannot bypass anything. Nothing more It has to say or do. Government is trying its best to fight. I find no point in blaming the government for the lack of efficiency to handle the situation. At the end, I am left with nothing but my faith. Faith alone has something to take me forward. If I am to blame my faith then I will be nowhere. Thus, we need to unite this collective consciousness; collective trust; and there we will encounter God who alone can give us the strength to fight the battle.



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Being Alone with Oneself: Encountering God in Silence

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We always long for a world where we always meet or contact people either at work, in the supply store, on streets or over phones and through social media. In fact, our society tends to label anybody who wants to be or is alone, as isolated or even more drastically as depressed. However, today across the country, also across the world people stare at a drastic experience that no near past can illustrate. The COVID-19 pandemic is radically and rapidly changing our world. The situation is same, irrespective of nationality and religion, richness and poverty, developed or underdeveloped, sophisticated or simple; we are all facing the same thing together, while being apart.

The Silence of Quarantine

We are consumed and confused by hearing diverse opinions of what to do and how to think in the Covid-19 crisis. Perhaps, we are now invited to ponder at an uncommon practice that the Psalmist describes: “For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him” (Ps 62:5). Silence is undoubtedly a forgotten practice in this generation. We have mastered a lot of skills in a world that is

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highly advanced in expertise and techniques, but perhaps have neglected the most important skill of all: the ability to be alone, to learn solitarily, to



understand one’s own strengths and weaknesses, to reflect on life and to appreciate the wonder and the beauty of the nature. Being alone is intentionally deciding to get away from everything and enjoying being with oneself, savouring the beauty of life. We have forgotten how to enjoy our own company. However, today we hear more about the Quarantine, being alone because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Quarantine forces upon a change of plans that we probably won’t like because it limits our mobility and contacts. It confines us to our own homes. It is a recommendation and at the same time an obligation to separate us from the world for the two-fold purposes: to save oneself and to save others from the COVID-19 infection.

Encountering God in Silence

We can know only ourselves when we earnestly look at ourselves in silence. “Be still and know”, says Aristotle. Taking time to be alone is very productive and it can be a wonderful experience. It means to take time away from the social media and friends and finding a suitable place to be with oneself, to relax and analyse our habits and see how they touch our lives. As a believer in God, it is a time to encounter with God in the stillness of our lives. Prophet Elijah, who were to receive God’s message, is a good example (1Kings 19:11). Briefly, there seems to have been a thunderstorm and an earthquake but the Lord was not in either or even in a fire. Then came a still, small

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voice. Elijah covered his face with his cloak and he came out and got the message. Thus, one can find God in stillness and silence. Stillness is more internal and denotes interior peace, tranquillity, restfulness and quietude of mind and heart. It prepares us to be open to the Spirit and thereby receive the Spirit of God. Stillness prepares us for communion and oneness with the Divine. Everything that is broken and distorted has a chance to begin again within us, a chance to bring us back to the source, to the beginning. According to Eckhart Tolle, stillness is timeless inner space on oneself. It is inner most awareness of self.

Silent reflection enables us to wake up to the truth that there is something more to life than what we can see and that there is someone bigger (God) who is real and loves us. This encounter should make a transformation in our lives, especially in our attitude towards others.

God speaks to us in many ways: through the scriptures, nature – the sun and the moon, the rivers and the mountains, birds and animals, our joys and sorrows. Perhaps, His voice is the loudest in silence, in the silence of the desert as the Prophet Elijah testifies. The time of quarantine is a time for us to encounter God in our stillness and the encounter can change our life and attitude. Encounter with God can bring an after effect. We see many examples in the Bible. For instance, Moses, who encounters God in the burning bush (Ex 3: 1-12), had a change in his life. It is a unique personal experience, yet it concerns the whole people. It is the starting point of his mission.

An important step in encountering God in your life is investing time in silence. Silent reflection enables us to wake up to the truth that there is something more to life than what we can see and that there is someone bigger (God) who is real and loves us. This encounter should make a transformation in our lives, especially

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in our attitude towards others. The Christian encounter of God necessarily takes us to our brothers and sisters.

Concluding Challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic astonishes us. Consequently, there are many unanswered questions and apprehensions. We are deeply struck by very tiny, intangible and invisible virus! It is here that we need to instil a positive attitude, a transformation. Amidst this pandemic we can find rays of hope and future. We are close to the celebration of the great feast of resurrection of Jesus where we encounter the risen Christ. In Him we find a new hope and future. In Him we have new life and new order of life. With this trust and hope let us move forward in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic and experience God, whom we are called to share with our brothers and sisters!

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**“For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him”
(Ps 62:5)**



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Do Not Cling to Me!

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Do not cling to me! Are you a proponent of social distancing or detachment? Social distancing is the magic mantra to be recited and put into practice. As the Easter season approaches how are we to make sense of the lockdown? This year's Lent will be an unforgettable Lent for the Christian world, heavily loaded with fear and anxiety, deeply charged with emotions- the grief, the sorrow and the utter helplessness. The lockdown offers a forced withdrawal from the consumeristic-world, spirit leading us into the desert as it were. Not much to consume except the **online content**. Most of us are clueless as to how to spend the lockdown period. Having to do nothing is so annoying and distressing; just being and not doing anything was not that easy. Confined to a room could be a claustrophobic experience leading to boredom and frustration. With ever swelling surge in Covid-19 cases the lockdown may extend, and that's the worry of most of the Indians. The Easter season may look like an extended Lenten season. Can we cull out something from the resurrection accounts to make sense of the lockdown?

Mary Magdalene

In the scriptures, Mary Magdalene is first to witness the resurrection of Jesus. Mary turns twice- a turn within the turn (Jn 20: 14, 16)- to the one who calls while she was frantically looking for Jesus. The Lockdown was the first turn we made but the second turn is a deeper turn inviting us to a personal conversion to embrace a new life. The

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embrace is natural once the Lord reveals himself to us, as he did to Mary. When Mary recognized her Rabbouni she tried to cling to Jesus, but Jesus told her not to cling on to him. 'Do not cling to me' is a change of focus, Jesus is pointing towards his mystical body. Jesus redirects Mary's desire for union with himself from his physical or earthly body to the new locus of his presence in the world, that is, the

Mary's encounter with the risen Lord tells us that God wants us to be with the community of faithful and announce the good-news to the afflicted and cling to the mystical body of Christ.

community of his brothers and sisters, the disciples. In other words, we need to place ourselves at the tomb – the finality of affliction and suffering- in order to experience the power of resurrection. For our times it would be to search for the Lord hysterically like Mary, , in homeless, the destitute, the migrant, the poor, and in the afflicted. Being quarantined too could be seen as a greater mission to stop the further spread of the disease. Social distancing is another tool at our disposal to contain the spread and be united in spirit with the physicians, experts, health care workers, police personnel and the administration. Thus, alleviating the pressure on the health care system. The encounter with the Lord ought to fill us with Easter joy and peace. The peace that the risen Lord offers is a pre-requisite for reception of the holy spirit. We are duty-bound to give the peace of the Lord to those in trouble and tribulation due to corona-crisis. The encounter of the risen Lord is profoundly transformative, it dispels fear and anxiety. Mary's encounter with the risen Lord tells us that God wants us to be with the community of faithful and announce the good-news to the afflicted and cling to the mystical body of Christ. Social

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distancing is not to be understood as saving oneself but saving the community.

The Emmaus

The lockdown, with lurking uncertainty, can really sap our energy leaving us empty and dissatisfied. The anxiety and disappointment too can overpower us like the two disciples walking to Emmaus. We are not alone on this journey of war against Corona there is risen Jesus who walks along (often as stranger) we just need to be vigilant as to know what burns our heart and what sets our heart ablaze. As Jesus walks with us he waits for our invitation to dine with us. Even in that hour of frustration and utter hopelessness the disciples did dare to share what they had with the stranger. The sharing, breaking of the bread, open their eyes to recognize the presence of Jesus. At this hour of pandemic, we too need to share with the strangers and needy and have that experience of experiencing the risen Lord. The disciples would have loved to remain in that union at the breaking of bread but the Lord disappears; perhaps he does not want us to cling to him. Rather, like the disciples wants us to rush to the community to announce the good news. The disciples who were disappointed and had lost hope in Jesus, were filled with hope again with the mission to proclaim the gospel of the Lord.

The Early Christians

As the scripture says the early Christians lacked nothing because they shared all that they had with the community. Tertullian wrote that while pagan temples spent their donations “on feasts and drinking bouts,” Christians spent theirs “to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined to the house.” The Christ who



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shared/sacrificed his life was the sole inspiration of the early Christians. Their sharing was frowned upon; for they were overwhelmingly selfless.

Eucharist was another occasion of sharing, though the eucharists were not as often as we have. They were once in a while and needed a lot of preparation. The eucharist would sustain their faith till the next. There are no masses during lockdown period, more or less the same situation as the early Christians under persecution. Though we have the luxury of watching the mass being celebrated but cannot consume the consecrated species. It's been almost a month we are without the eucharist. It's our testing time to see how deep are the waters of our faith. Moreover, the Quarantined period poses a challenge of living the eucharist. Breaking our body for the other, the suffering other is the call of this year's Easter. One needs to undergo the passion of Christ in order make sense of Jesus' resurrection. Let's be the Passover that redeems the suffering humanity. There's no greater love than to lay down one's life for the other.

Can we say that “**I have seen the Lord**” in the suffering other, in poor, migrant workers, daily wagers, and the lonely elderly crowd as we distance ourselves from the people? The command of Jesus is to not cling to him but to cling to his mystical body.

Can we say that “I have seen the Lord” in the suffering other, in poor, migrant workers, daily wagers, and the lonely elderly crowd as we distance ourselves from the people.”



Quarantine Regulations in Lev 13: Social Isolation Out of Anxiety and Helplessness, as Well as Hope and Faith

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“Quarantine” almost always means the absolute separation – either limited as to a given time or even lifelong – of a person or a group of people apart from the society because of special hygiene reasons. Mostly it is an act of a society’s self-protection against highly contagious virus diseases which may easily lead to epidemics or even pandemics. The modern term is of French origin and does literally mean “a forty-days timespan”, since in the late middle ages – when the term came in use – people thought 40 days to be the ideal timespan for healing and fully recovering. This believing in a somehow supernatural power of a 40 days span, of course, was of strongly biblical and other ancient scriptural influence. Even if the technical term reaches back only to the middle ages, the described phenomenon is much older and can also be shown in ancient near eastern cultures and in even earlier ones as well.

The Biblical Text

Within the Old Testament we find the most far extended quarantine regulations in Leviticus 13, especially verses 1-8; 45-46. The text is embedded into a series of various cases leading to (cultic and/or hygienic) impurity caused by natural or accidental physical diseases, and presents itself as testcase documenting the deep-rooted

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interdependency of natural science, medicine and theology. Virus diseases were often found to being seen as God’s punishment or at least as departing from the physical body as a result of priestly or even magic rites. Lev 13:1-8; 45-46 runs as follows:

By trusting in the priest’s decision and also in a healing process within a 14-days-isolation under the priest’s auspice, they showed their faith in God.

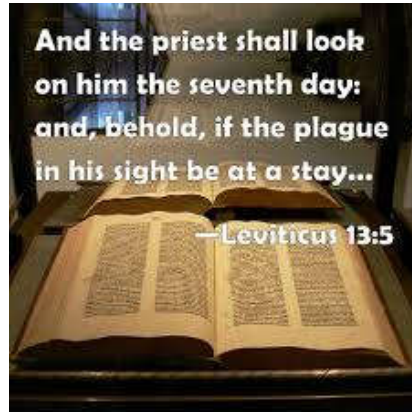
The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. The priest shall examine the disease on the skin of his body, and if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous disease; after the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean.

But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall confine the diseased person for seven days. The priest shall examine him on the seventh day, and if he sees that the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall confine him seven days more. The priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the disease has abated and the disease has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption; and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean.

But if the eruption spreads in the skin after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest. The priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease.

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The person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

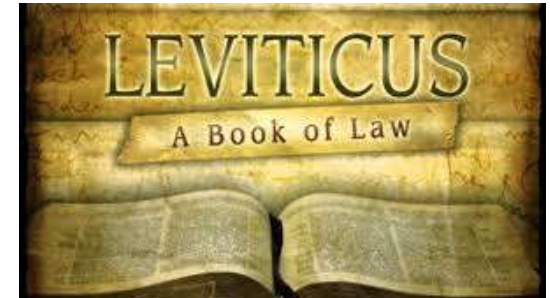


The Procedure of Quarantine

This part of the text at first glance seems to deal with skin diseases causing cultic impurity. A more careful reading, however, may shed some light on a handful of exciting details. Firstly, it is important to know, that any long-term impurity for divine cult automatically led to social impurity and therefore exclusion from any human face-to-face contact as well. Secondly, despite the appearance of numerous kinds of skin diseases, the text only differentiates between two cases, namely if it was a leprous disease or not. The reason for that is to be seen in the leprous diseases' being derived from highly contagious virus infections which were as a rule incurable, whereas non leprous skin diseases almost always were curable and not thus contagious as well. Thirdly, the proof of the quality of a disease may pass through up to three steps: if one shows symptoms, he or she is sent to the priest. The priest makes a first check of the disease; is it without any doubt leprous, the person is to be declared unclean, is there a doubt remaining, a quarantine of seven days is to be directed. On the seventh day, the priest makes a second check; is there no

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clear and visible negative change, another seven days of quarantine are directed.



Thereafter, the priest makes a third check; is there still no negative change to state, the person is declared as clean and gets reintegrated into the society, if there is, he or she is declared as unclean and sent in a long-term or even lifelong quarantine. If one stays in a seven-days-quarantine, he or she for this timespan just has to be separated from the society. If one stays in a long-term quarantine, he or she has to settle outside the village, separate oneself from all the others, and fulfilling additional rules; these are above all the covering of one's upper lip and to make sure, that nobody may catch the virus by drawing too near.

Anxiety-Helplessness and Hope-Faith

The reasons for all these regulations at least were the feelings of anxiety about one's own and the whole society's health and welfare on the one and of absolute helplessness considering the dangerousness of a highly contagious virus on the other hand. But at the same time the text also contains information about hope and faith of the ancient Israelites. By keeping all the given rules, they expressed their hope for keeping the virus outside their villages and (bedouin) camps. By trusting in the priest's decision and also in a healing process within a 14-days-isolation under the priest's auspice, they showed their faith in God.

Concluding Remarks

In the moment we face a worldwide virus based pandemic crisis, and we have similar feelings to those of biblical Israel, namely first of all anxiety and helplessness. And we trust in

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similar reactions: we separate cases of suspicion as well as confirmed ones from the society, many cover their upper lip with nose-mouth-masks and we try to keep distance between one another. But we may also take example by the biblical narration according to hope and faith. Good hope many of us do have; we are willing to accept hard restrictions of our civil liberty, because we trust in the ordered regulations. Nevertheless, quite a number of our brothers and sisters suffer intensely; many have already lost beloved fellows, others lost their jobs, the already poor become even poorer, and so on. The bible text encourages us to keep believing in God's grace, mercifulness and love, also – and especially – in a time as we face it currently. Our nowadays priests' duty is not any more to make the medical checks, according to this we trust in our medical doctors, but pastoral care and mission – done by priests, religious and lay spiritual advisors – may be a chance for Christian communities to foster our common Christian faith and to make Christian charity visible. That does not change the situation as such we experience, but it makes our common hope for better times much more realistic and cheerful

The bible text encourages us to keep believing in God's grace, mercifulness and love, also – and especially – in a time as we face it currently.

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A Scientist and Servant-Leader to Heal COVID-19

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Anthony Stephen Fauci (1940-) is an American immunologist who has made substantial contributions to HIV/AIDS research and other immunodeficiencies. This the veteran HIV/AIDS researcher, who has been involved with every epidemic over the past 40 years, has even treated Ebola patients. He is very familiar to scientists, health officials, and politicians, having led National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), since 1984. He has advised US presidents all the way back from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump. Articulate, candid, and true to his core, he has become a rational voice of science and a public figure

Frank and Polite

He has been very direct and truthful with the public about the reality of the coronavirus in USA and many of his comments have indirectly contradicted Trump's comments.

For instance, while Trump said that the USA would have a shot for coronavirus quite quickly, Fauci said his estimate was that a vaccine wouldn't be available for a year and a half. While Trump also said that the coronavirus will soon disappear, Fauci shared that he thought the world was on the verge of a pandemic.

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In an interview with Politico, Fauci shared his difficulties of advising the President of the US. He said: “You should never destroy your own credibility. And you don’t want to go to war with a president,” he continued. “But you got to walk the fine balance of making sure you continue to tell the truth.”

Because of his scientific mind and love for truth, Fauci has become a public target for some right-wing commentators and bloggers, who exercise influence over parts of the President’s base. As they urge the President to ease restrictions to reinvigorate economic activity, some of these figures have assailed Fauci and questioned his expertise.

This 79-year-old doctor, a key member of President Donald Trump’s coronavirus task force, has been the most outspoken advocate of social distancing rules. Fauci was among the health advisers on Trump’s team encouraging a continuation of the current guidelines after the President heard from business leaders and some of his conservative allies that the restrictions were more damaging than the virus itself.

Honest, Brave and Innovative

From the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, or for that matter since the 1980’s and the HIV/AIDS crisis, we find a good old-fashioned American hero. Like a Gary Cooper riding into save a town in the Old West, Tony Fauci is quiet, under-stated in style. Maureen Dowd’s *The New York Times* op-ed on March 21, 2020, described President Trump as “trigger happy”; by contrast, she said Dr. Fauci is “honest, brave and innovative”. “I don’t want to embarrass him,” the immunologist says. “I don’t want to act like a tough guy, like I stood up to the president.”

“But you got to walk the fine balance of making sure you continue to tell the truth.”

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Men for Others

Fauci, an acclaimed scientist, is also a committed Catholic. He is also an alumnus of Jesuit School. Writing in the prestigious *Forbes Magazine*, William F. Meehan III adds: “This common bond of a Jesuit high school education is amongst the strongest of any in American education, unknown to most who do not share it. And what Jesuit high schools offer is exactly what we need most and are sadly lacking in our country—education that offers strong academics, yes, and in a more disciplined environment that supports teaching and learning” (Meehan III 2020).

They try to educate people and foster leadership that is humane with spiritual values. “*Men and Women for Others*, is their mission.” Meehan III quotes Rev. Christopher Devron, SJ, a Jesuit, President of Fordham Prep, and board member of Regis, where Fauci studied:

“The phrase *Men and Women for Others* was originally coined in 1973 by Pedro Arrupe, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus to describe the outcome and goal of Jesuit secondary education. The phrase caught on, and has since been adopted as the unofficial motto of Jesuit schools across the globe. But the idea is not new as it reaches back to the 16th Century when Ignatius Loyola, a Spaniard and founder of the Jesuits, decided that his fledgling religious order would sponsor schools.” (Meehan III) Ignatius became convinced that Jesuit schools would “educate a vanguard within society: a

The phrase *Men and Women for Others* was originally coined in 1973 by Pedro Arrupe, the 28th Superior General of the Society of Jesus to describe the outcome and goal of Jesuit secondary education.

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group of dedicated citizens with the skills to articulate clearly a well-reasoned argument, committed to serve humanity, and advance the common good. Meant to be elite (as opposed to elitist), Jesuit schools were founded to educate the rich, the poor, and everyone in between” (Meehan III).



Meehan III adds on: “For Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, faith is active: the true believer is someone who recognizes the needs of the world around him, and acts, like Christ, in the service of those in need. Regis aims to produce graduates who are “men for others” - men who have dedicated their lives, in some fashion, to helping other people... All of the school’s goals for the personal development of its students - intellectual, moral, spiritual, and emotional - must be understood with this end in mind: Regis students are asked to develop all their abilities so that they may be used in the service of others.”

Servant Leader

Dr. Fauci, a product of such education, has imbued these values. He has become “that real, rare person—a servant leader.” According to Meehan III this is largely, “because of the education and values he received from a high school build on a foundation of Ignatian values: serving others. It’s a foundation of humane values largely absent from America’s educational institutions.”

Servant leadership is a wholly secular idea and in the words of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. In an essay first published in 1970 Greenleaf writes: “The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That

person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them, there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature” (Meehan III).

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. Do the others, while being served by the leader, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? This is in keeping with Mahatma Gandhi’s talisman: “I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man [woman] whom you may have seen, and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him [her]. Will he [she] gain anything by it? Will it restore him [her] to a control over his [her] own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj [freedom] for the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and your self melt away.”

A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid,” servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.” Meehan III unambiguously holds that Anthony Stephen Fauci is such a

leader who is primarily at the service of others and the community, with his scientific knowledge and quest for truth.



So, *The Washington Post* has said that Fauci “fights outbreaks with the sledgehammer of truth” (Tumulty 2020). It adds: “While Trump tries to play down the severity of a public health crisis that might affect his reelection prospects, Fauci has laid out the best assessment of the true danger in stark terms” (Tumulty 2020). He has the knowledge, the wisdom and the humility! A genuine seeker, an effective healer and a practical scientist.

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An Evolutionary Perspective on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Like most schools, my university in south Texas shuttered in mid-March. As of this writing we are under increasingly strict, though necessary, containment rules as the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (COVID-19) transforms the global face of human culture. I am blessed with a small patio, the opportunity to walk in a small park, and my online senior students in evolutionary biology. We have been tracking the evolution of COVID-19 as their graduating project, since January.

The Origins

Biologists do not classify viruses as living organisms, and you will not find them as a branch on a tree-of-life diagram in text books. Their origins are puzzling, but like living organisms they utilize DNA and/or RNA as a reproductive vehicle, so we study them. They do not metabolize, cannot move, and must take over the genome of a living cell, or host, where they issue instructions for their own multiplication and assembly.

Viruses employ two highly successful general strategies for replication. The first involves taking over the cellular machinery and forcing the cell to make multiple virus copies. Called lytic, the cell then bursts and new virus are released to invade other cells. Ultimately, viruses are transmitted to other host individuals where the process repeats in new host cells.

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Think of influenza for example. In a second strategy (lysogenic), viruses insert themselves into host cell genomes and remain dormant. As living cells make copies of themselves, the viral DNAs are also copied and inherited by host daughter cells. As in the case of HIV, lysogenic viral DNAs can remain dormant for many years, but in the end, kill host cells once they activate (AIDS). During the dormancy period, viral DNAs can be transmitted to new individuals.

These include plants and bacteria, and other lesser known taxa. Approximately 8% of the human genome is made up of ancient viral DNA sequences acquired, and passed down, from our pre-modern civilization ancestors.

All living organisms examined to date harbour viruses as part of their natural makeup. These include plants and bacteria, and other lesser known taxa. Approximately 8% of the human genome is made up of ancient viral DNA sequences acquired, and passed down, from our pre-modern civilization ancestors (ERVs, endogenous retroviruses), and close to 50% of the human genome is composed of mobile genetic elements (transposons) that can physically move in and out of genomes. Transposons play a central role in molecular medicine because they can potentially target improperly functioning parts of the genome, and insert corrected instructions. Since the advent of farming, plant-feeding insects have transmitted viruses from native plants to crop plants as well.

The Spread of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a member of the coronavirus zoonotic subgroup of viruses that causes disease in birds and mammals. Coronavirus prefer respiratory tract cells, and are composed of a lipid-protein envelope that surrounds a single strand of RNA. Viruses, and other pathogens or parasites, that kill their hosts before being passed

(infection) to other hosts are unsuccessful and become extinct. Many new diseases that cause high host mortality at the beginning of epidemics, become milder over time. A 'bad' evolutionary strategy is to kill your host before it can make and transmit, additional copies to a new host.



On March 31st, the US released estimates from 12 epidemiological models that predict a US nationwide death toll of approximately 100-200 thousand by August (millions infected), due to COVID-19. Globally, those numbers will certainly vary by nation, political system, and culture. Population and evolutionary biologists expect to see a secondary resurgence, somewhat less severe, but none-the-less significant and many months long. Until a vaccine is widely available (12-18 months from December 2019, we hope), constrained human contact will continue to be the only viable approach to slowing spread.

The Near Future

What parameters affect the near term? The first answer is containment. That is, we must change the natural selection parameters that enable COVID-19 to move from human host to human host (transmission). Viral transmission success, from the point of view of COVID-19, is highly dependent on the density of its host. That is why many governments have required citizens to remain inside of living quarters until infection levels decline precipitously. Population density is, and will continue to be, a particular problem among the poor and itinerate. Secondly, viral transmission success is also highly affected by

the number of virus particles that are actually received by a potential new host. Work with many other viruses, and preliminary experiments with COVID-19, show that the fewer the viral particles transmitted, the significantly less severe the symptoms.

Lessons from our recent past teach us much about the great net of being in nature.

These data explain the disturbingly increasing mortality rates among health care workers in hospitals: they are regularly exposed to the most critical cases that are shedding the largest number of viruses. Any exposure whatever, is very likely to involve high concentrations of viral particles.

In the opinion of biologists, the COVID-19 pandemic has just begun, and will continue to widen. We have been predicting this very scenario for decades, and have seen dress rehearsals in the cases of the Ebola, SARS, MERS, and Zika epidemics. From a simple numerical stand point, the present circumstances were unavoidable. Our accelerated, and insistent, consumption of wild lands has simply increased our encounter rate with everything in creation that lives, 'out there'.

Lessons from our recent past teach us much about the great net of being in nature. Reports on the several Ebola outbreaks since 1976 have tended to emphasize the role of the native host reservoir, fruit bats, and partial containment by prohibition of bat trade along important African rivers. However, the initiating events had nothing to do with bat trade. Prolonged, and in some cases, severe, regional droughts (climate change?), resulted in large scale tree fruit and bat roost loss. Bats sought refuge, and roost space, in open air thatched huts of outlying agricultural communities where they shed Ebola virus in faeces and urine. Both sources aerosolize when dry, and are thus breathable by human inhabitants. Killing the human host

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quickly, proved to be a mostly poor evolutionary strategy for Ebola virus, although not ending with extinction.

In unrelated circumstances in 2004, civet cats (a relative of the mongoose) were found to be a native intermediate host of another coronavirus (SARS) in Guangzhou China, which precipitated the wholesale slaughter of thousands of animals by drowning or electrocution. Neither prevention of trade, or native host extermination, is even relevant as a solution to the current pandemic. COVID-19 has made a successful evolutionary jump to humans and is deeply, and permanently, embedded in modern humans. Its initial act of adaptation will be keenly experienced for some time.

How then, do we go about our future? It seems that questions of natural selection and adaptation now clearly rest in the willingness of each of us to transform. It is a time for those of us with the resources to so do, to learn how science is actually practiced; its benefits and its limitations.

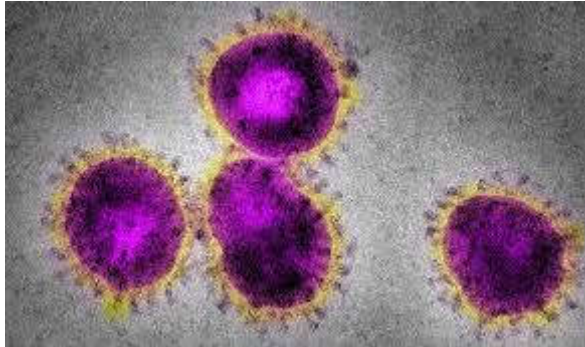
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Concluding Challenge: Beyond Resignation

We must insist on unprecedented levels of cooperation between nations (and their corporate sponsors) to find vaccine treatments and transparently share accurate data. Successful treatments have to be equally shared by and with All. Now is not a time for resignation or cynicism, but for accepting the reality and consequences of forgetting who we are as Imago Dei, Creation-becoming. For now, and for good, we must each learn to embrace, practice, and experience solitude not as loneliness, but

Now is not a time for resignation or cynicism, but for accepting the reality and consequences of forgetting who we are as Imago Dei, Creation-becoming.

as community. With all Creation, we are surrounded in, and contained by, the Comforter, the Advocate, the Cosmic Christ.



Corona: Living or Non-Living? Yet Lessons for the Living

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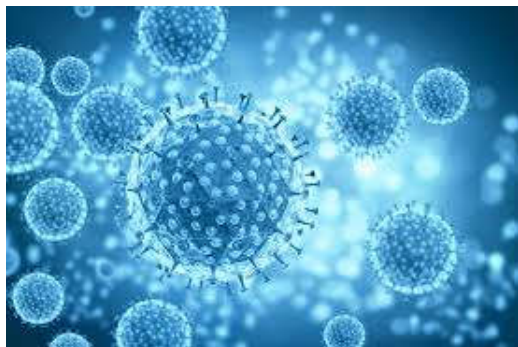
These days Corona has become a buzz word that shocks and terrifies the whole world. By December 2019, China officially declared that a new type of Corona virus is attacking its State, Wuhan. The earlier one, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS 2), and the present Covid-19 belong to the group of Corona virus. First let us have a few basics of Virus in general and then go the lessons that humanity can get from it.

Corona: The Basics

Virus is extremely tiny and it is invisible to the naked eyes. These are the infectious agents with living and non-living features. The unique feature of a virus is that it can infect by entering a host cell; they cannot reproduce on their own. Viruses are not cells, they are strands of genetic material, with a protective protein coat called capsid. They infect a wide variety of organisms. Corona is said to be a large virus at the dimension of 20 to 400 nm. [A nano metre is 10^{-9} metre]. It has only RNA, covered by fat and protein. They get washed away by alcohol or soap (in 20 seconds); there are sort of spikes around its body, enabling it to get hooked onto another living cell; this gives the appearance of a crown, and that is how it gets its name, CORONA, which, in Latin, means a crown. When it enters our throat, it gets into the tissues there and gets multiplied very fast; at a particular stage it causes severe cough; the immune system

in our body fights against it by raising the body's temperature very high, in order to kill it. Whenever any foreign organism (like a virus or bacteria) enters our body, our immune system recognizes it in two ways: by the shape of the foreign agent and the chemicals emitted by it. White blood cells send Macrophages and Neutrophils to finish off those viruses. If they don't completely succeed and the virus has spread further in our body, lymphocytes, that is, T-cells which are part of them, try to cause the affected cells of the lungs to commit 'suicide' and to expel them so that they don't further damage other tissues; it also tries to reduce the number of cells that are engulfed by the virus. If the virus is still invincible, B-Cells, which is a lymphocyte, try to tackle the virus; these cells recognize the virus and drag them to lymph nodes and kill it with the chemicals produced over there. Similarly, Corona virus, after a few days of stay at the throat, enters lungs through the respiratory tracts; the inner walls of lungs have billions of very minute Epithelial cells; virus enters these cells and sends its RNA and this multiplies into millions, and each RNA will turn into a virus! Within ten days or so, most part of the lungs will be engulfed by the virus.

When our immune system sends cells into the lungs to fight against the virus, a sad and horrible thing happens – virus enters these fighter-cells of the immune system to kill them; further they create a “confusion” in the genes of those cells. The cells of our immune system usually communicate with one another with the help a



chemical called, Cytokines. The affected cells send out confusing cytokines and the neutrophils cells, which actually come in to save lungs, begin to destroy immune system cells, instead of killing the virus. Similarly, T-cells,

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instead of doing its actual job, begin to give out information to destroy the healthy cells in lungs. With this, being vulnerable to further attacks by bacteria, lungs develop pneumonia; and this very often becomes fatal to the patients.

Thus, Corona is extremely devilish in making our own immune system antagonistic to our body (so it looks like, even God cannot help us!). Even the T-killer cells and B-cells have not succeeded in identifying the killer corona exactly,

because the virus has millions of ways to create the communicating-chemical, cytokines, and that is why, we are not able to arrest the multiplication of the virus and we cannot make a vaccine to prevent it either. When we normally take medicines, they usually change into chemical information and fight against the virus or bacteria directly, or enable our immune system to produce the required antibodies to fight against them. But as Corona takes our immune system into its control, the medical world is really stunned and unable to fight against this killer virus, corona. The good soldiers, T- and B-cells, are so badly misled and confused that they begin to destroy the good cells in lungs, instead of saving them. But in spite of all these difficulties, our immune system is largely able to fight against the corona virus, though, who already have respiratory issues or

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“I must confess that I don't understand how life came about... The most primitive cell may require at least several hundred different specific biological micro-molecules. How such already quite complex structure may have come together, remains a mystery to me. The possibility of the existence of a creator, of God, represents to me a satisfactory solution to this problem” -Werner Arber

low immune system are easily affected, even resulting in unfortunate deaths. The diabetic patients have less immunity power; those with heart diseases or hyper tension are not able to circulate enough blood to fight against this virus. But if these problems are controlled with proper medications and with sufficient physical exercises, they also can escape the virus attack.

We don't unfortunately know how long it will take to develop a vaccine to prevent it because even for HIV, we have not been able to invent a vaccine, even after 35 years! Though HIV also cripples our immune system, it luckily does not spread through coughs and sneezes, and at that perspective the present Corona is more dangerous than HIV. However, luckily, a lot of Corona-infected patients do recover from it, if their immune system is strong enough. As we don't have the medicines to cure, nor any vaccine to prevent it, the best way is to be very cautious not to contract this virus. Several precautionary measures are taken individually and collectively to personally escape from it and not to contribute to the transmission of it. [Something interesting to think about: **V _ R _ S** What is missing?... I and U... So, only **U** and **I** can kill the virus, by keeping ourselves away, and, in fact, we can give VRS (Voluntary Retirement from Service) to the virus!]

Corona's Lasting Lessons: Life Still as Mystery!

The Corona-related issues, in my opinion, give one more occasion to reflect upon the very notion of life and its meaning and meaningfulness. Perhaps we can never understand what (human) life is, as long as we are "caught" up in the contours of life; we may have to soar up, or go 'beyond' life, so to say, to understand what life is and that is never possible. If one is able to do that perhaps one

Are Viruses Living or Non-living?

| Characteristics of life | Virus | Cell |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Growth | No | Yes |
| Homeostasis | No | Yes |
| Metabolism | No | Yes |
| Mutation | Yes | Yes |
| Nucleic Acid | DNA or RNA | DNA |
| Reproduction | Only with host | Cell Division |

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cannot communicate to others about it, as others are still entangled in the web of life!

T. D. Singh, a pioneer in *Science-Religion Dialogue* from the Indian thought perspectives, suggests, "A sincere attempt to understand life... is of foundational importance and it will have important relevance in deciding the relation between science and religion." Erwin Schrodinger, a quantum physicist wonders, in his book, *What is Life?* (1944). *Science Journal* (July 2005) lists out 125 questions which cannot be answered by modern science; for instance, 'How and where did life on earth arise?' – and still more intriguing question is, 'What is that life?', Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, a Hungarian Nobel Laureate and biochemist declares, "In my search for the secret of life, I ended up with atoms and electrons, which have no life at all. Somewhere along the line, life has run out through my fingers".

Sciences may be able to separate all biochemicals like nucleic acids (RNA, DNA), carbohydrates, lipids, enzymes and all other basic building blocks of organic bodies but will they ever discover what is that which gives life to them? It is said that more than fifty minerals, salts and chemicals are essential for life and the ratio of their combination is also very crucial for the holistic health of our body; for instance, if sodium is more, it damages blood vessels and increases blood pressure and causes other heart diseases; but if it is less, it causes low blood pressure, damages nerve cells, the muscles of the heart and digestive systems. The most fascinating fact is that all these chemicals are "lifeless" in themselves, but still they are necessary to make life possible!

It is generally understood that a **living being** is made up of cellular organization; it needs nutrition, respiration; it grows and develops, moves, reproduces, responds to stimuli; further it maintains homeostasis, stability and constant internal conditions; metabolism takes place in it; having organ systems

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to carry out different functions of the being. **A non-living being** is made up of atoms and sub-atomic particles; it does not need food for energy to perform activities; it does not grow in size or develop into something else; it does not eat or excrete, nor reproduce or multiply. **A dead being** is an organism that once had life, but now no pulse; eyes are dilated, body is cold, emitting foul odour, muscles become rigid and start decomposing. Further, in the medical world, two types of death are recognized: **Somatic Death** – it involves stoppage of respiration, circulation of blood and brain functions, and **Molecular Death** – involves the death of all organs, at different times; while liver dies rapidly, heart takes sixty minutes and cornea takes six hours to die. There is obviously a time-gap between these two types of death; all living beings will undergo these two types death.

But regarding the status of virus there is an alarming ambiguity! One cannot easily decide whether it is a living or a non-living being. It manifests some signs of life like multiplying when it is parasitic to another living cell (of a plant/animal), but left alone in the environment it cannot respond to stimuli, it assumes a crystalline form, cannot grow or multiply or reproduce. Outside a living cell it cannot survive, because it cannot create energy and there is no ‘agency’ to reach out to food, nor is there any metabolism (unlike bacteria, amoebas); some scientists consider virus as a missing link between non-life and life.

That is why, even today, the notion of life and its origin are very mysterious. Werner Arber, a renowned biologist makes an honest confession: “I must confess that I don’t understand how life came about... The most primitive cell may require at least several hundred



different specific biological micro-molecules. How such already quite complex structure may have come together,

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remains a mystery to me. The possibility of the existence of a creator, of God, represents to me a satisfactory solution to this problem”.

Equality: An Indisputable Fact

Humans are now forced by the corona to feel equal to one another. Though every nation and every race has been focusing on the differences to show its might over the others, to boss over others and to manipulate all possible ways to safeguard its own comfort zones, yet they are now taught a great lesson of equality, perhaps, in a tough way! The virus does not know the differences of regions or religions, colour or creed, rich or poor, wise or otherwise; it does not discriminate against the developed or developing countries. Not only ordinary people on the streets are killed but also even those from the royal families are also not spared (like the Princess of Spain). After several centuries the rich and the affluent are taught to remind themselves of life’s transience and fragility. Many of us have been living as if youth, health and wealth are the default settings of life, but now we are taught some basic lessons of life, perhaps in a harsh way! The whole world joins together in fighting against the menace; all leading scientists and research laboratories all over the world join their hands to find out the ways and means to control the spread of the infection, and to find a vaccine against it.

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Every nation or race may have unique achievements and capacities but to the eyes of nature we all are same and equal. All natural forces are equally harsh or equally gentle to all humans, without any discrimination on any account. Of course, we need to cherish the differences of various regions, languages, creeds and cultures, but we must not forget the indisputable fact that we are all basically equal, travelling in the same boat in the vast ocean of reality; as Pope Francis, in the context of corona-issues, reminds us that “all of us are fragile

and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together”. Instead of focusing on the differences that keep us apart, we are now taught to focus on the factors that unite us, realizing that we are certainly equal.

Humility: A Natural Emotion for any Thinking Person

Corona, such a tiny and mysterious thing poses an indomitable challenge to the world of science. In fact, science has even measured the unimaginably huge universe; it has managed to learn that the invisible universe is much larger than the visible one (the former is 150 sextillions – 150×10^{21} times bigger than the latter!); however we become so helpless that we have, so to say, to surrender to this little virus. Even the developed countries feel very abandoned and overwhelmed in dealing with this menace; they just throw their hands up in total surrender. Glorious economic powers and mighty military prowess don't make any sense to this invisible agent. Is it another instance to show that the *invisible determines the visible*?¹

This small little thing has made the whole world to come to a standstill; it has closed the worship places down; it has silenced the noises of the ultra-modern world; it has caused the downfall of the economy; transports have been halted. Yes, it is a big blow to humanity, which has been assuming that it is in control of everything, including its own destiny. But humanity is now forced to look for wisdom and discernment to find out what the real fulfilment in life is; it is time to listen to the *INNER VOICE*; perhaps, we can now hear it very loudly as the external noise is forced to be silent. Even a cursory look at this scenario teaches a

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person, and every nation, to be humble, no matter what his/her/its achievements are!

Conclusion

It is also time to think of God's innumerable blessings. It is said that an eighty-year-old man was infected by corona; fortunately, he got recovered in a few days; he was discharged from the ICU. The hospital gave him the bill to pay the amount of 5000 Euro for the ventilator he used. Seeing the bill, he started weeping bitterly; the staff asked him, whether he had no that much of money to pay. In-between the sobbing he said, "No, no, I have the money... I just thought that all these eighty years I have been breathing so effortlessly, but I never thanked God for such a precious gift, that he gave me completely free!". Yes, that makes us realize how humble we need to feel, for all the sun, water and air that we have been enjoying from nature without any payment!

Finally, this dangerous virus may be living or non-living, but it certainly has lessons for us, who are still living. As we are all existentially connected, we can't survive as an individual nation or race; let us unite together; let us all, individually and collectively, do whatever we can to fight against this virus and save the earth for the future generations. Brains and knees (efforts and prayers) have to complement each other because what one can do, the other cannot do. Let us raise our hands and hearts to the "SKY". Let us do our best, trusting the capacity of the God-given reasoning power.

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¹ As sciences develop humanity is increasingly realizing that the visible world is determined by the invisible, in all possible worlds; for instance, the physical world is determined by the four invisible fundamental physical forces, both at the sub-atomic and cosmic levels; the galaxies in the incredibly vast dark universe are determined by the invisible black holes, and even our very words and actions of our day-to-day lives are determined (or shaped) by the invisible emotions, convictions, beliefs and value-systems.



Coronavirus and Humans: Science's Hitherto Inability to Put Humpty Dumpty Together

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No predicament in recent times, perhaps all through history, has shaken the whole world so seriously as the Coronavirus threat today. As I think of it, the nursery rhyme I memorized during my early school days flashes across my memory lane: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." Who this Humpty Dumpty was, and what exactly happened to him are unimportant. The fundamental message is clear – the pathetic helplessness of the most powerful king with all his resources to put the shattered Humpty back to normalcy. The sad and progressively deteriorating Coronavirus predicament seems to have created a similar situation for us humans.

Science: Amazing, But Limited

Brilliant science, backed by amazing technology, has almost touched its peak now. The physical science is getting ready to probe into the mystery world of dark matter and dark energy, hopefully with the help of gravitational-wave technology. The Chinese just 3 years ago achieved the hitherto unmatched feat of teleporting photons to a distance of 1,400 Kilometres, seemingly defying Einstein's Relativity Theory. In the biological world, assisted by breakthroughs in the field of genetics, the same Chinese scientists have succeeded in coming up with genome-edited human babies

with HIV-resistant capabilities. In the world of neurology, scientists are ready to produce robots and humanoids that are claimed to be capable not only of equalling humans but even outsmarting them. Space science seems to have reached a stage where space-travel can become an everyday affair. In fact, there have been reports that the scientific maverick Elon Musk has already started taking bookings for interplanetary trips. So goes the long book of the success-story of human-made science. It seems that science is all set to write the last chapter of the success story of its triumph over Nature. Precisely then ushers in the shocker, the puny little Coronavirus-2 with its scary Covid-19 just to remind human arrogance that Nature too is capable of playing a few "dirty tricks" on humans.

Corona: Tiny, But Monstrously Mischievous

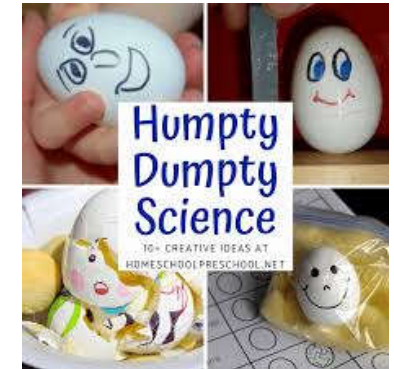
Coronavirus-2 or simply Coronavirus is the short form of SARS-Cov-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2) and the disease it causes is COVID-19. Biologically speaking, viruses are at the bottom of the ladder of living beings. In fact, scholars point out that they may be placed in the grey area between living and non-living beings. Being a parasite, strictly speaking they do not have an existence of their own. They need to have a host to survive and reproduce themselves. They attach themselves to the host living cells, and use the genetic materials of these to reproduce themselves. When coming to their size, they are smaller than bacteria which are single-celled beings. Scholars point out that we can place

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about 500,000 viruses side by side within a centimetre of length. Despite all this low status and limited capabilities, they can be deadly on us humans. They are infectious, and they target successfully the most vital and vulnerable part of the human body – the respiratory system. In fact, today the mighty, space-ready humans are helplessly shivering before this Coronavirus! Tens of thousands have already died, and many more are waiting in the death-row! The most ominous statement came from Dr. Anthony Fauci, top infectious disease expert of USA, just on 30th March 2020: “Looking at what we're seeing now, I would say between 100 and 200,000 (deaths)” (Cole, Bohn & Bash 2020). Of course, the range he gives is vast; let us hope and pray that the reality will not be so bad. As of 4th April 2020, the frightening data is: number of deaths 59,203, tested positive cases 1,117,918, those recovered 229,000. Some predict that the total number of positive cases may mount up to 2 million! It may be noted that the recoveries I have been able to study were mostly milder cases of comparatively healthy persons with no serious medical complications. What about those lucky not to be infected yet? They too have to bear the brunt of it all. The whole world is held in ransom, having become literally a global prison! I wonder whether the world had such an experience even at the peak of World War II! These tiny little mischief-makers, who do not own a home of their own, who cannot earn their own daily bread, have really played havoc with us mighty humans. With all our ultra-modern telescopes that can peer into almost 13 billion years in the past, with all our super-specialized microscopes which can detect the tiniest of the tiniest, we humans have been cornered by this

Human limitedness is a message of this experience. We have achieved a lot, particularly in science and technology. Yet, we are nowhere close to writing the last chapter. We have miles and miles to go!

corona, at least for the time being. Surely, I am confident that an effective vaccine is on its way, but seems to be a rather long way – experts today give 12-18 months for it to reach us. I hope and pray that it will not take that long! But by the time that happens more than enough damage will have been done not only to human lives, but also to human pride and independence!



Some Takeaways

What are the takeaways? A few quickies as they flash across my mind. We live in a webbed world through and through – we are all linked together intrinsically and intricately. In such a world everyone matters – even the tiniest, faceless, address-less Corona! No one can be taken for granted, no one can be ignored. The fragility of humans is another lesson we learn in this context. With all our laudable and admirable achievements, we are fragile. A small misstep can be fatal. Experts tell us that Corona were no new comers into our world. They cohabited with bats for ages. But last year they decided to pay an unfriendly visit to humans – it was a very costly visit! We did not have the power to stop the visitor. Human limitedness is another message of this experience. We have achieved a lot, particularly in science and technology. Yet, we are nowhere close to writing the last chapter. We have miles and miles to go – that is the lesson I learn from my long study of almost 450 years of the triumphant march of science. It is pretty clear that Nature cannot be outsmarted by us humans. For Richard Dawkins God is an illusion; for Stephen Hawking God is the unnecessary and unwanted creation of the unenlightened. But the “Ancient One” of Albert Einstein refuses to go away,

refuses to hand over all the secrets to humans, and humans time and again find themselves helpless to change this state of affairs. Our fate is not much different from the ancient Humpty Dumpty! Periodically, without fail comes the reminder: Humans are creatures of the Creator, and will remain so. Surely, in some ways, by using their God-given talents and capabilities wisely and ingeniously, humans can become collaborators with the Creator, but never co-equals. It seems that this phenomenon of Corona cornering humans is a reminder of this perennial fact of human limitedness.

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Metanoia: An Eco-Spirituality as the Need of the Hour

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This short article has been written in the event of the outcome of the dangerous and deadly corona virus epidemic that has paralysed the whole world. ¹The corona epidemic should not be seen as an isolated viral infection but it throws light to the destructive attitude of humankind towards mother earth. The crisis we face today is threefold, namely, the ecological predicament, the humanistic crisis and the theological dilemma. The one-sided anthropocentric worldview, which is controlled and carried by reason, made us forget the interconnectedness of reality. We fail to make a synthesis among the different spheres of life because of our lack of patience empowered by reason, and overconfidence that originates from the sensory knowledge. What is at stake then is a satisfactory and sufficient account of reality, an integrated understanding of the Divine, the world and human. We see this division in all areas of life, the body-soul split, the sacred secular bifurcation, the God-world-human separation, the past-present-future partition, science-faith severance, worship-work segregation etc. In this situation, we should go for a complete transformation, which removes the dichotomy and fragmentation and helps us view reality as an 'integrated whole' that accommodates human, the cosmic and the Divine. Humankind has to overcome the absolute

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instrumentalization of the world, fragmentation of the human and the meaninglessness of the Divine.

In this world, nothing is isolated and everything is interconnected with everything else with the thread of non-dualism (*advaita*), i.e., from electromagnetic to divine and from human to angelic. We should not only overcome the dichotomies spawned by compartmentalisation, but also the estrangement of human person and nature and the dualism of the Divine and the world. The Divine, the human and the cosmos become less and less real because of the human blindness to see the unity in the mere apparent diversity. This fragmentation of seeing and knowing becomes the fragmentation of reality itself. For example, the myth of space and time: the myth of space with its threefold division of 'God above', 'human in between' and 'underworld below' needs to be re-interpreted. The myth of time with its stringent division of 'past, present, future' stands in need of new hermeneutics. We need to have a unified and integrated perception of reality. Underneath the diversity of common experience, there is a rhythm of harmonious oneness, which weaves together the inner vitality of life and reality. The beauty of this interrelatedness brings everything into a concordance.

Modern human person endowed with reason and assisted by a limited anthropocentric vision of reality has instrumentalized nature for his/her own egoistic purposes. Guided by the Goddess of reason and the objective thinking of science human being believes that the mastery over nature leads to the height of success. The adoration and admiration have gone after the progressive thinking of science. This exploitative mentality is considered as the progressive thinking of the modern world. Human person has looked down upon anything that has to do



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with the “mystery.” The mystery aspect of reality is perceived as something that is against the spirit of science. Human scientific and technological pride seems to be threatened and offended at the thought of anything beyond human control. “Mystery” has

The estrangement of human person from nature is in fact, the real tragedy of the present day.

given way to “mastery.” Dazzled and overwhelmed by the astounding accomplishments of science modern human being thinks that the most efficacious approach to know reality is the experiment. However, through experiment we can never know the earth’s wisdom just as by experiment alone, we will never discover the mystery aspect of the human body and its real life. This experimenting attitude results in not only the disrespect of the Divine and the human, but also the exploitation of nature.

The estrangement of human person from nature is in fact, the real tragedy of the present day. Here, human person seems to be in dialectical opposition to nature. The civilized humans consider themselves as non-natural human beings. Their home is no longer the earth but the ideal world. They tame and subjugate nature. Nature is demythicized; there is no mystery about it. The sacred thread of collegiality that has woven the artistry of nature becomes broken and scattered into pieces. Humans have not only simply taken their sustenance from the mother earth, but also they have further exploited and violated her. The natural circle is broken if we convert *agriculture* which is a sort of love-making with the earth into *agribusiness*, which amounts to the violation of nature, significantly called world “resources,” for the profit of the exploiter. The “maximum” has replaced the “optimum.” The denuded forests, the polluted atmosphere and the stained seas are the best example of this exploitation.

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The earth is our mother. She is our very self. To destroy our relationship with nature is to destroy our very selves. In this sense, human survival is



inextricably linked with the survival of nature. The elevation of nature from objective level to a personal realm further implies the need of experience to understand her rather than to experiment. In this experiential level, we allow nature to penetrate us. Here, we are not only “seeing” but “hearing” too. That means, this process of experience is both active and passive at the same time. By allowing her to speak, we discover the earth’s wisdom. Human person shares in the life of the universe. In other words, human being as a microcosm is sharing the life of the earth, which is the macrocosm. The “real” cannot be disassociated from the bodily and it cannot exist without matter, though it does not consist of matter only. Life is not only about the material world. Life means the incorporation of the Divine in the human and its impregnation of all the structures of the material world. The world is no longer that which is fleeting but it is the very clothing of the permanent, the eternal and the immutable. This is precisely what we mean by *sacramentality* of the world. Many writers present human person as the prophet of creation, which is the complementary aspect of the priestly role. Since world is the symbol of God’s intentions and purposes it has to be read and interpreted correctly and act accordingly for the overall development of the world. Without this prophetic function, there will be no progress. As a prophet and interpreter, human person has to read the signs of the ‘time’ and interpret it for the future. This notion shows us to the dynamic attitude that humans ought to have towards the world, in accordance with the changing situations.

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Moreover, the role of a prophet is to point out the shortcomings, correct it, and in turn, reinstate the lost order and harmony and bring everything into a concord.

The idea that describes human being as prophet and interpreter of the meaning of God in accordance with the signs of the time catches our observation. How can humans discern that they have read and interpreted these signs correctly according to the creative purposes of God? Today, all claim that they have the “wisdom.” Some of them even claim that killing their fellow beings is in accordance with the divine purposes. Human being is

not satisfied with the present natural resources and s/he splits the soul of nature by splitting atoms (cosmic abortion) only to get more energy. This extra energy is used again against nature and fellow beings. How much natural energy (energy from oil, gas etc.) is made wasted for the sake of waging wars for the selfish motives of one or two powerful nations? It is commonly believed that many viruses are created as biological weapons in the laboratories of the big nations to use against enemies. Even corona virus, people believe, is also of such kind. These powerful nations are interpreting the divine meaning and purpose for others too! They themselves have acquired the prophetic role to bring everything into disharmony by destructive means such as wars, invasions etc! But, for whose achievement...their own! Are these advancements or disadvantages? Then, it will not be progress but an easy way to disaster and tragedy. The polluted atmosphere, the

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A metanoia from dvaitha (dualism) to advaitha (inclusivism), from self-elevation (greed) to self-expending (Trinitarian life-perichoresis), from life-negation(sin) to life-affirming (fraternity), from knowing the instrumental value of nature to knowing the intrinsic value of nature.

contaminated rivers, the extinct species, the exhausted natural resources stand as evidences to this ecological disaster. If this is, what is implied by creative and right interpretation of the signs of the times, then it will be self-destruction or suicide. We cannot draw boundary line for the cosmos or the human brotherhood. Is our nuptial bond with nature broken? Did the relationship with our beloved get divorced? These are the questions, which we have to ask ourselves in the light of the present crisis of corona epidemic. So, how can we differentiate the right interpretation from wrong ones? Here, we need a wisdom that helps us discern well so that we can transform ourselves through a radical conversion of mind, body and heart. Therefore, we have to foster an **eco-spirituality** that makes us to realize our wrong attitude towards nature and advocates a *metanoia*, - a radical *turning back*. A *metanoia* from *dvaitha*(*dualism*) to *advaita* (inclusivism), from self-elevation(greed) to self-expending (Trinitarian life-*perichoresis*), from life-negation(sin) to life-affirming (fraternity), from knowing the instrumental value of nature to knowing the intrinsic value of nature.

Conclusion

I conclude my article stating a notion from Daniel Quinn’s book “*Ishmael*”. In this book, a gorilla talks about humans (*takers* who exploit and conquer nature for their egoistic purposes), “You know how to split atoms; you know how to splice genes and how to send explorers to the moon. However, you don’t know how humankind ought to live in harmony with nature” (not a direct quote). Let us learn how to live in harmony with nature. That is perhaps the need of the hour.

¹ I am indebted to R. Panikkar and A.R Peacocke (Cosmotheandric vision and the Panentheistic Vision respectively) to pen down these ideas.



Coronavirus and Climate Change

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It is heartening that the COVID-19 pandemic has elicited a global response unlike anything we've seen before. From government and business taking on new roles to respond to the crisis to the complete re-organisation of how we work, travel and socialize, we have witnessed transformational changes that didn't appear possible just weeks ago. The human costs of the pandemic are horrifying, but the response has largely been characterised by care, compassion and connection – and an unheard-of pace of change.

There are two future possibilities, according to Victoria Crawford, Project Leader, Environmental Resilience, World Economic Forum, Geneva (Crawford 2020). The first one is alarming. As the immediate crisis wanes and its economic consequences become clearer, we cast aside longer-term aspirations in pursuit of short-term easy fixes, many of which would have adverse environmental consequences. These include rolling back environmental standards, stimulating the economy by subsidising fossil-fuel-heavy industries and focusing on making more things, rather than using them better.

The second possibility is hopeful. While we are reeling in the shock of what is happening around us and coming to terms with our new reality, we could seize this moment as a unique window of opportunity to re-build our society and economy as we want it. With scientists warning we have 10 years left to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, this could offer an opportunity to fix the climate crisis before it's too late.

The human costs of the pandemic are horrifying, but the response has largely been characterised by care, compassion and connection – and an unheard-of pace of change.

A number of shifts brought on by the COVID-19 emergency lay the groundwork for the transformation required. Crawford (2020) suggests five affirmative actions we can take, inspired by response to coronavirus pandemic.

Re-Think Risk

We have known about the risk of a global pandemic for years: just see Bill Gates declare during a 2015 Ted Talk that “If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it is most likely to be a highly infectious virus... We should be concerned. But, in fact, we can build a really good response system.” Yet it took an unfolding disaster to prompt governments, businesses and individuals to act at the scale required.

Climate change similarly poses a major threat to human lives and urgently requires a comprehensive response. A study published in the medical journal the Lancet predicts 500,000 adult deaths caused by climate change by 2050. Out of them 248,000 will be from China and 136,000 from India! A frightening prospect.

If the pandemic teaches us to acknowledge our vulnerability to high-impact shocks such as pandemics and climate-related disasters, we will be infinitely better placed to prepare for them.

Listen to Global Perspectives

The truly global nature of the COVID-19 crisis is forcing us to recognise that we are all in this together. For example, China sending help to Italy represents more than just shifts in the geopolitical landscape; it also shows an overcoming of the sense of “other,” and an acknowledgement that events in one part of the world can affect us all.

If we make people the priority, listen to global perspectives and trust experts, we can hope to bring about radical changes in our life-styles that will save our environment.

The jury is out on whether COVID-19 will prompt the world to choose the route of national isolation or global solidarity, but a growing understanding that we are inherently connected to people in vastly different geographies and circumstances can help build momentum for strong climate action.

Make People the Top Priority

The response to COVID-19 has seen the plight of patients, medical staff and other vulnerable groups skyrocket to the top of the agenda – of individuals, businesses and governments alike. Many individuals are re-arranging their lives to practice social distancing, offering elderly neighbours help with their chores and volunteering in health facilities and food banks, showing the power that can be unleashed when we are united behind a common cause.

Businesses are re-directing their production lines to provide medical and hygiene supplies, offering free access to their online platforms and supporting their employees in a number of ways, such as increasing their wages, highlighting how agile they can be in responding to critical needs. And governments are committing trillions to help those affected by coronavirus,

in what looks like a “race to the top” in providing the most comprehensive support to their citizens.

All this shows that a large-scale response to a global crisis is possible. We need to harness this wave of compassion and proactivity to protect vulnerable people in all contexts, including those most exposed to climate impacts.



Trust Experts

As the significance of the pandemic has dawned on us, the value of knowledge has become increasingly clear. The advice of epidemiologists has gone viral (we've all seen the “flatten the curve” meme), and doctors have been held up as heroes. This might represent a turning point in a trend towards the demise of experts.

We need to listen to climate scientists and policy advisors to win the climate change fight too. A greater trust in experts of all types takes us in the right direction.

Make a cultural shift

Many aspects of the COVID-19 response are similar to the types of changes we need as part of a comprehensive climate-change response. What is interesting is that many necessary shifts just require a change in culture. For example, neither the surge in cycling and expansion of bike lanes in Bogota as citizens avoid public transport, nor the coronavirus work-from-home experiment, have required any new technology, but instead have relied on new thinking.

It is clear that we have many of the tools to make major advances in addressing climate change; what we need now is the political will to apply them.

Much remains uncertain about what the world will look like when we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, but the fundamental societal changes we are witnessing may well offer us a final chance to avoid a climate catastrophe.

Conclusion

As the world recovers from COVID-19, we must not let short-term fixes prevent us from addressing longer-term risks of climate change. If we make people the priority, listen to global perspectives and trust experts, we can hope to bring about radical changes in our life-styles that will save our environment. We realise that the ecological crisis poses a greater threat than corona pandemic (Chundattu 2020).

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Listen to the Earth Speaking to Us

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Isiah 26: 20- Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until His wrath has passed by.

This time of coronavirus, though a time of terrible test and trial, leaves us with many lessons to learn. It Tests our faith in the Lord, our patience with our loved ones, our sensitivity towards our neighbours by not hoarding things and our love for all mankind by staying indoors.

Although COVID-19 has disrupted our daily life, our work, our schedule, it is undeniable and unavoidable the benefits it is doing to nature – our ozone layer is improving, our pollution levels are dropping and we have all realised how dispensable we all are. How the world will still go on without humans, better in fact!

Crying Out for Help

In such times of crisis we turn and return to God, we cry out for help, and sometimes we start doubting if God really listens, if he really exists, and if he does, why does he put his people through the test?

We all believe that our life is a gift from God and we pray to him that we may join him in life eternal after we pass from this world. Then why do we fear death?

Psalm 112:7 They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord

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Psalm 31:24 Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Pope Francis recently addressed the people and asked them to keep faith, be strong and believe in the Lord narrating a passage from the Bible. But how many of us actually can freely surrender our lives in the hands of God and say that “Lord I place my life into your hands. Let your will be done”? How many can really resolve to say? “In these trying times that I have on this earth let me be good, let me be helpful and let me reach out to someone.” Especially in these difficult times, we can reach out to the people who need our help, to the sick, the suffering and the old.

Corinthians 1:10 - I appeal to you brothers and sisters in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

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Overcoming the Evil by the Good

Jesus saved us by taking upon himself all the suffering and humiliation, without complaining but with humility, grace, courage and obedience, purely out of love. God did not take away the evil that crushed Jesus in his suffering but rather strengthened him so that our evil could be overcome by good and love that loves to the very end. We need to keep in mind especially in these times of crisis, when we feel alone, abandoned and at a dead end, with no hope or way out, when we doubt the presence of God and feel that he is not responding to our prayers, we must remember that we are not alone, Jesus

“Lord I place my life into your hands. Let your will be done; In the time that I have on this earth let me be good, let me be helpful and let me reach out to

too experienced all that we go through and more and yet he kept faith in His father, and surrendered totally to him. “Father if possible, take this cup from me; however not my will but your will be done.”

The Lord knows our hearts better than we do, he knows how weak and faltering we are, how many times we fall and how hard it is for us to rise up again after our fall and how difficult it is to heal certain wounds. And that is why he promises us, ‘I will heal them through their faithlessness, I will love them deeply’.

In spite of the trauma, I think that we may be able to draw blessing even from this dreaded corona experience. It calls us to focus on what’s really important, it shows us that we don’t need much to survive, just the essentials!

It reminds us that we have come alone and we will be going back alone and this life what we are given is not a rat race, but it is a gift, a precious gift. It takes us back to our roots, to keep life simple and uncomplicated and cut out all the negative noise and situations that we put ourselves into.

It’s a time to rediscover ourselves, to realise that life is not worth living without love and service to others, to go deeper into your own selves. And if we all survive this covid-19 period. We have a chance to start our lives afresh and anew. Leaving all that is unnecessary and negative behind, we can learn to be resurrected people in Christ, Easter people.

“Father if possible
take this cup from
me; however not
my will but your
will be done.”

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As Easter people, we are called take root in the ground, live in harmony with the wind, plant your seeds in the winter, and rejoice with the birds of the coming of spring. Life is simple. We just need to be aware of what’s important and lasting. We can be a blessing to so many around us, in spite of these terrible, trying times!



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The Preacher and the Plague

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We are living a fatal plague, we do not know who will come out of it. Albert Camus published *The Plague* in June 1947, three years after the liberation of Paris from the Nazi occupation. The Plague (TP) is the tale of a natural calamity that descends on the Algerian town of Oran. Evil is the plague in the soul of man which continues pecking the liver of any man as in the case of Prometheus. I have locked up myself in the library of the University of Leuven to understand and defend God from the complicity of evil which was a problem of highest concern for me. In the aforesaid novel, Tarou while narrating the story of his life to Dr Rieux, tells: “I know positively ... that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth, is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless movement we breathe in somebody’s face and fasten the infection on him. What’s natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous will-power, a never-ending attention of the mind, to avoid such lapses” (T.P. p. 207). This is exactly what happens today all over the world. The corona virus has lifted all our absolute laws of the Church and made them relative to man. Finally, we all realised with a short span of time that man does not live for Sabbath. The god-men within

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retreat centres of our Church went on conducting healing services while all possible and real diseases are made dumb and mute by the virus. There were lot of egoist pretensions not only in the religious fields but also in the positive sciences. All without any distinction – poor, rich, high class or low class – were made mere prey of the deadly virus.

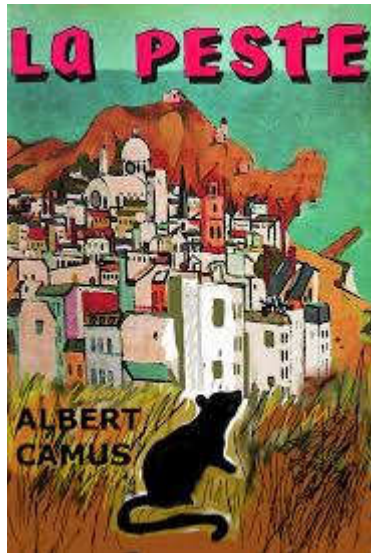
“He spoke in a gentler, more thoughtful tone than on the previous occasion, and several times was noticed to be stumbling over his words. A yet more noteworthy change was that instead of saying ‘you’ he now said ‘we.’

Father Paneloux of Camus’ novel is the learned Jesuit who sees the plague as the divine punishment dreaded by sinners. In spite of what divides the five characters of the novel they will work side by side for something that unites them ‘beyond blasphemy and prayers.’ The plague appears as the symbol of evil, as the fate’s weight on man, as death, as the symbol of life itself. The Plague can be read as the chronicle of an epidemic and as the symbol of human condition. Dr Rieux’s metaphysical rebellion reaches its apex in the novel. After witnessing impotently the long and cruel agony of the poor boy, together with Tarou and Fr Paneloux, Dr Rieux suddenly vents his rage on the Jesuit, who is asking him to love what he cannot understand. ‘Until my dying day,’ he retorted, ‘I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture’ (TP, p. 178). Dr Rieux is terribly angry with Fr Paneloux for attempting to justify the suffering and death of human beings, to give evil a meaning and a raison d’être. The priest said that ‘there were some things we could grasp as touching God, and others we could not.’ Fr Paneloux was now walking, may be unsuspectingly, in the footsteps of metaphysical rebels. He became finally convinced, like Dr Rieux, that ‘it is not the suffering of a child which is repugnant

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in itself, but the fact that the suffering is not justified' (TP, p. 73). Fr Paneloux preached two sermons in the midst of the plague but the second significantly differed from the first. "He spoke in a gentler, more thoughtful tone than on the previous occasion, and several times was noticed to be stumbling over his words. A yet more noteworthy change was that instead of saying 'you' he now said 'we' (TP p. 182). The priest lies surrendered to death, reconciling with it, while the latter resisted it. 'I don't want to die, Tarrou said to Dr Rieux, and I shall put up a fight. But if I lose the match, I want to make a good end of it' (TP p. 231). Tarrou thus courageously fought death the same way as he resisted historical nihilism in the novel.

Fr. Paneloux fails to defend the divine from the complicity of evil, or his explanations do not convince anyone nor does it defend his God. Strangely enough he does not fail to stand with the suffering man. It is the failure of theodicy, a failure in thought and speech but not in activity. The divine escapes his language, or he never understands his God. What can be shown cannot be said. Language cannot represent. What expresses itself in language, we cannot express by means of language. Propositions show the logical form of reality. They display it. If only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – contained in what has been uttered! Language thus contains a dialectical tension between the expressible and the ineffable. The limits of language cannot be overcome but by poetic language which can insinuate or resonate the other worldly values. As a seeker of the truth of the mystery evil is revealed in the crucified who cried



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aloud on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me". The world suffers from the absence of God. The word which became flesh lost his body. Mary Magdalene is seeking the body of the Lord ready to take it away. The Church lives to give body to Him. The Priests every day make His body, "This is my body." A body to enter history and make justice and love embody to serve God in man and in the world. A theodicy can be drawn from the cry of the cross and the solemn silence that haunts the world. The responsibility of the follower of God is to respond to the absence of the divine in the world afflicted by plagues.

The Christian response to plagues begins with some of Jesus's most famous teachings: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"; "Love your neighbour as yourself"; "Greater love has no man than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends." Put plainly, the Christian ethic in a time of plague considers that our own life must always be regarded as less important than that of our neighbour. During plague periods in the Roman Empire, Christians made a name for themselves. Historians have suggested that the terrible Antonine Plague of the 2nd century, which might have killed off a quarter of the Roman Empire, led to the spread of Christianity, as Christians cared for the sick and offered an spiritual model whereby plagues were

"The plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; ... it can lie dormant for years in furniture and linen-chests; ... it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and ... perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city."

Are We the Plague for Nature?

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The Plague by the existentialist thinker Albert Camus is a powerful and prophetic novel about a plague epidemic in the large Algerian city of Oran. Published in French in 1947 as *La Peste* and in English in 1948, as *The Plague*, it is set sometime in the 1940s. The author doesn't provide an exact year, but he describes in vivid detail the pain and suffering that strikes the lives of rich and poor alike.

The Story

In April, thousands of rats stagger into the open and die. When a mild hysteria grips the population, the newspapers begin clamoring for action. The authorities finally arrange for the daily collection and cremation of the rats. Soon thereafter, M. Michel, the concierge for the building where Dr. Rieux works, dies after falling ill with a strange fever. When a cluster of similar cases appears, Dr. Rieux's friend, Castel, becomes certain that the illness is the bubonic plague. He and Dr. Rieux are forced to confront the indifference and denial of the authorities and other doctors in their attempts to urge quick, decisive action. Only after it becomes impossible to deny the serious epidemic, do the



not the work of angry and capricious deities but the product of a broken Creation in revolt against a loving God. But the more famous epidemic is the Plague of Cyprian, named after a bishop who gave a colourful account of this disease in his sermons. Probably a disease related to Ebola, the Plague of Cyprian helped set off the crisis of the Third Century in the Roman world. But it did something else, too: It triggered the explosive growth of Christianity. Cyprian's sermons told Christians not to grieve for plague victims (who live in heaven), but to redouble efforts to care for the living. His fellow bishop Dionysius described how Christians, "Heedless of danger ... took charge of the sick, attending to their every need." Nor was it just Christians who noted this reaction of Christians to the plague. A century later, the actively pagan Emperor Julian would complain bitterly of how "the Galileans" would care for even non-Christian sick people, while the Church historian Pontianus recounts how Christians ensured that "good was done to all men, not merely to the household of faith." I conclude with the words of Albert Camus in *The Plague*, "The plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; ... it can lie dormant for years in furniture and linen-chests; ... it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and ... perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city (TP, p. 252).

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authorities enact strict sanitation measures, placing the whole city under quarantine.

The Reaction

The public reacts to their sudden imprisonment with intense longing for absent loved ones. They indulge in selfish personal distress, convinced that their pain is unique in comparison to common suffering. The Jesuit priest Paneloux delivers a

stern sermon, declaring that the plague is God's punishment for Oran's sins. Raymond Rambert attempts to escape Oran to rejoin his wife in Paris, but the city's bureaucrats refuse to let him leave. He tries to escape by illegal means with the help of Cottard's criminal associates. Meanwhile, Rieux, Tarrou, and Grand doggedly battle the death and suffering wrought by the plague. Rambert finalizes his escape plan, but, after Tarrou tells him that Rieux is likewise separated from his wife, Rambert is ashamed to flee. He chooses to stay behind and help fight the epidemic. Cottard had committed an (undisclosed) crime in the past, so he has lived in constant fear of arrest and punishment. So he greets the plague epidemic with open arms because he no longer feels alone in his fearful suffering. Further, accumulates a great deal of wealth as a smuggler during the epidemic.

After several months, many of Oran's citizens lose their selfish obsession with personal suffering. They come to recognize the plague as a collective disaster that is everyone's concern. They confront their social responsibility and join the anti-plague efforts. When M. Othon's small son suffers a prolonged, excruciating death from the plague, Dr. Rieux shouts at Paneloux that he was an innocent victim. Paneloux, deeply shaken by the boy's death, delivers a second sermon that modifies the first. He declares that the inexplicable deaths of innocents force the Christian to choose

“This whole thing is not about heroism. It’s about decency. It may seem a ridiculous idea, but the only way to fight the plague is with decency.”

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between believing everything and believing nothing about God. When he falls ill, he refuses to consult a doctor, leaving his fate entirely in the hands of divine Providence. He dies clutching his crucifix, but the symptoms of his illness do not match those of the plague. Dr. Rieux records him as a “doubtful case.”

When the epidemic ends, Cottard cannot cope with the intensity of suffering. So he begins randomly firing his gun into the street until he is captured by the police. Grand, having recovered from a bout of plague, vows to make a fresh start in life. Tarrou dies just as the epidemic is waning, but he battles with all his strength for his life, just as he helped Rieux battle for the lives of others. Rambert's wife joins him in Oran after the city gates are finally opened, but Dr. Rieux's own wife dies of a prolonged illness before she and her husband can be reunited. The public quickly returns to its old routine, but Rieux knows that the battle against the plague is never over because the bacillus microbe can lie dormant for years. *The Plague* is his chronicle of the scene of human suffering that all too many people are willing to forget.

The Plot

The Plague isn't exactly a novel. It does not have a complex plot and dramatic action, though it has momentum and suspense. It's a philosophical work with reflections on freedom, terror, love, and exile and on the necessity of bearing witness. Still, despite its refusal to play by the traditional rules of French fiction, it offers six major characters, all of them men and all intended to be representative types, though they lack real individuality.

The six men are: Bernard Rieux, a medical doctor; Jean Tarrou, an outsider who arrives in Oran just before the advent of the plague; Raymond Rambert, a journalist; Joseph Grand, a government clerk; Monsieur Cottard who goes mad and shoots people on the street; and Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest. There

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are no political leaders and no military officers. Indeed, there's a vacuum of leadership.

The Religious Approach

The Plague offers a happy ending of sorts. The pestilence vanishes almost as mysteriously as it arrived. Optimism is reborn, but a sense of uncertainty lingers. Those who are alive in Oran want medals merely for surviving. The reader is left with the assumption that the plague can return at any time. On the last page, Camus writes about "the never ending fight against terror."

His language suggest that he was thinking about religion when he wrote *The Plague*, and, though it's not an explicitly Christian book, it offers words and concepts like "grace," "crucifixion" and "deliverance." Religion provides a kind of subtext, though the book doesn't endorse Oran's Catholic Church. What Camus wants are healers, not priests, political leaders and certainly not demagogues.

At the height of the plague, when five hundred people a week are dying, the Catholic priest Paneloux explains the plague as god's punishment for depravity.

But Camus's hero Dr Rieux loathes this approach. The plague is not a punishment for anything deserved. That would be to imagine that the universe was moral or had some sort of design to it. But Dr Rieux watches a young innocent child die in his hospital and knows better: suffering is entirely randomly distributed, it makes no sense, it is no ethical force, it is simply absurd and that is the kindest thing one can say of it.

**"If all insects on Earth disappeared, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the Earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish."
Jonas Salk**

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The doctor works tirelessly against death, he tries to lessen the suffering of those around him. But he is no saint. In one of the most central lines of the book, Camus writes: "This whole thing is not about heroism. It's about decency. It may seem a ridiculous idea, but the only way to fight the plague is with decency." A character asks Rieux what decency is. Doctor Rieux's response is as clipped as it is eloquent: 'In general, I can't say, but in my case I know that it consists in doing my job.'

Camus' Doctor Rieux appreciates dancing, love and nature; he is hugely sensitive to the smell of flowers, to the colours at sunset and – like Camus – adores swimming in the sea, slipping out after an evening on the wards to surrender himself to the reassuring immensity of the waves.

The Pest of War

Camus equates pestilence with war and says that both are horrible. "There have been many plagues in the world as there have been wars, yet plagues and wars always find people equally unprepared. [...] When a war breaks out people say: 'It won't last, it's too stupid.' And war is certainly too stupid, but that doesn't prevent it from lasting. Stupidity always carries doggedly on, as people would notice if they were not always thinking about themselves. In this respect, the citizens of Oran were like the rest of the world, they thought about themselves, in other words, they were humanists: they did not believe in pestilence. A pestilence does not have human dimensions, so people tell themselves that it is unreal, that it is a bad dream which will end. But it does not always end and, from one bad dream to the next, it is people who end, humanists first of all because they have not prepared themselves."

Humans Being as Plague?

But he has not equated human being with plague. Considering the harm that we do to the other living species, that is exactly what the environmental activist and television presenter Sir David Attenborough has said. Humans are a plague on the Earth that need to be controlled by limiting population growth. He added that humans are threatening their own existence and that of other species by using up the world's resources. The discoverer and developer of the first successful polio vaccine, Jonas Salk, supposedly claimed: "If all insects on Earth disappeared, within 50 years all life on Earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the Earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish" (Cited in Attenborough 2013).

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The Bubonic Plague in Bombay and Pune (1896-1897)

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The Bombay plague epidemic was a bubonic plague that struck the city of Bombay in the late nineteenth century. The plague killed thousands, and many fled the city leading to a drastic fall in the population of the city. In September 1896 the first case of bubonic plague was detected in Mandvi, Bombay, by Acacio Gabriel Viegas. It spread rapidly to other parts of the city, and the death toll was estimated at 1,900 people per week through the rest of the year. Many people fled from Bombay at this time, and in the census of 1901, the population had actually fallen to 780,000. Viegas correctly diagnosed the disease as bubonic plague and tended to patients at great personal risk

From Bombay, it spread quickly to Bengal, Punjab, the United Provinces, and later even to Burma. However, its impact was most severe in Western and Northern India, while southern and eastern India escaped with relatively fewer deaths. By 1901, 4 lakh Indians were reported dead, and by 1905, the toll was 10 lakh!

Epidemic Disease Act of 1897

As the situation spun out of control, the British hastily drafted the Epidemic Disease Act of 1897 and began to enforce it in India. The Act gave the local authorities the power to do virtually anything they needed to salvage the situation, without

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any legal ramifications. At the time, the Assistant Commissioner of Pune, W C Rand, was tasked with implementing the Act. Initially, Rand made a genuine effort to provide relief by setting up quarantine camps and hospitals, while also disinfecting the plague-affected areas.

“Two kinds of the disease, and both deadly – natives dying by hundreds of hunger – Overseers stealing the supplies.” - A Presbyterian missionary

However, as the situation worsened, Rand adopted brutal measures, which stripped Indians of their dignity. Rand and his men, who included young doctors backed by the army and police, would publicly strip men, women and children in order to inspect sensitive body parts like their groins and armpits for signs of the bubonic plague. Infected individuals would be forcibly quarantined or shifted to hospitals. Often buildings, food, clothes and other properties of the affected individuals were ruthlessly burnt and destroyed, without their permission, during the process of disinfection.

The New York Times reporting the plague in June 1897 quoted a Presbyterian priest who had said, “Two kinds of the disease, and both deadly—natives dying by hundreds of hunger —Overseers stealing the supplies” Even though people who were simply suspected of being infected were forcibly taken away to detention centres, measures like these did not help bring the disease under control. Instead, they aggravated its spread, especially among the ones kept in detention centres.

Bombay faced the same situation as did Pune, and according to Cynthia Deshmukh in her 1988 journal article titled *The Bombay Plague* (1896-1897), communities like the Jains, Bhatias and the Baniyas living in chawls in the Mandvi locality added to the woes by refusing to allow the killing of rats due to their religious beliefs. In

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addition, a majority of citizens in Bombay refused to believe that they were infected and refused to go to hospitals and quarantine camps. Sometimes, their protestations caused large-scale chaos.

A majority of citizens refused to believe that they were infected and refused to go to quarantine camps.

Deshmukh in her paper cites the instance of a Parsi family who had a 13-year-old, infected Hindu boy living with them. The women in the family wielded knives and surrounded the boy so that he would not be taken away. They threatened to commit suicide using the knives if the boy was taken. The boy died the next day in the Parsi household, as neither the police nor the health officer could convince the women. The brutal steps taken by the British administration and the indignities they heaped on the local people led to a build-up of outrage. Add fear to the mix and it created for a very explosive situation. Once the reality of the plague began to sink in, panic gripped the people and thousands began to flee Bombay, taking the epidemic with them.

The Outrage Spills Over

Amid the chaos and din, the British government realised that a foreign ruling entity could not effectively tackle the situation without taking into account the social customs and mores followed by the natives. This led to the rise of a middle-class Indian leadership in the Bombay Presidency, and those with an English education tried to mediate with the British government.

The Plague in Pune

It all started in 1896 when the deadly plague reached Pune. It had initially affected the coastal cities with ports, but owing to its proximity to Mumbai, Pune too had been affected by it. By

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the beginning of January 1897, it had become nothing short of an epidemic.

In just a month, about 0.6% of Pune's population of 1,70,000 had succumbed to the disease. Nearly half of the population had run away from the city. That means about a lakh of people perished in Pune alone!

Rand had initially provided some relief—establishing a hospital, quarantine camps, in addition to disinfecting affected areas. However, these initiatives soon paved the way for more brutal steps that would rip the dignity of the affected families, and ignite the fire of anger among the minds like the Chapekar brothers, who tragically killed two British officers.

Conclusion

Almost 125 years ago when Mumbai and Pune experienced the terrible consequences of bubonic plague killing thousands of people, it may be remembered that it led to further exploitation of the poor. Overseers were stealing the supplies meant for the hungry. It also led to violence and killing of British officers. It is really sad that even during the time of major disaster the human hatred can still win over our hearts!

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The Greek Plague and Peloponnesian War

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Words like "epidemic" and "pandemic" (and "panic"!) have become part of our daily discourse. These words are Greek in origin, and they point to the fact that the Greeks of antiquity thought a lot about disease, both in its purely medical sense, and as a metaphor for the broader conduct of human affairs. What the Greeks called the "plague" (*loimos*) features in some memorable passages in Greek literature.

One such description sits at the very beginning of western literature. Homer's *Iliad*, (around 700BC), commences with a description of a plague that strikes the Greek army at Troy. Agamemnon, the leading prince of the Greek army, insults a local priest of Apollo called Chryses.

Apollo is the plague god – a destroyer and healer – and he punishes all the Greeks by sending a pestilence among them. Apollo is also the archer god, and he is shown firing arrows into the Greek army with a terrible effect:



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Apollo strode down along the pinnacles of Olympus angered in his heart, carrying on his shoulders the bow and the hooded quiver; and the shafts clashed on the shoulders of the god walking angrily. ...
 Terrible was the clash that rose from the bow of silver. First, he went after the mules and the circling hounds, then let go a tearing arrow against the men themselves and struck them. The corpse fires burned everywhere and did not stop burning.

In this background, we can understand the significance of the Greek plague of 5th century BCE and draw its contemporary relevance.

The Greek Plague

In the 2nd year of the Peloponnesian War, 430 BCE, an outbreak of plague erupted in Athens. The illness would persist throughout scattered parts of Greece and the eastern Mediterranean until finally dying out in 426 BCE. The origin of the epidemic occurred in sub-Saharan Africa just south of Ethiopia. The disease swept north and west through Egypt and Libya across the Mediterranean Sea into Persia and Greece. The plague entered Athens through the city's port of Piraeus. The famous Greek historian Thucydides recorded the outbreak in his monumental work on the Peloponnesian war (431-404 BCE) between Athens and Sparta. According to various scholars, by its end, the epidemic killed upwards of 1/3 of the population; a population which numbered 250,000-300,000 in the 5th century BCE. By most accounts, the plague which struck

Apollo is the plague god – a destroyer and healer – and he punishes all the Greeks by sending a pestilence among them.

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Athens was the most lethal episode of illness in the period of Classical Greece history.

Narratives of the Greek Plague

About 270 years after the *Iliad*, plague is the centrepiece of two great classical Athenian works – Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, and Book 2 of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Thucydides (c.460-400BC) and Sophocles (490-406BC) would have known one another in Athens, although it is hard to say much more than that for lack of evidence. The two works mentioned above were produced at about the same time. The play *Oedipus* was probably written about 429 BC, and the plague of Athens took place in 430-426 BC.

Thucydides writes prose, not verse (as Homer and Sophocles do), and he worked in the comparatively new field of "history" (meaning "enquiry" or "research" in Greek). His focus was the Peloponnesian war fought between Athens and Sparta, and their respective allies, between 431 and 404 BC.

Thucydides' description of the plague that struck Athens in 430 BC is one of the great passages of Greek literature. One of the remarkable things about it is how focused it is on the general social response to the pestilence, both those who died from it and those who survived.

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Health Crisis

The description of the plague immediately follows on from Thucydides' renowned account of Pericles' Funeral Oration (it is significant to note that Pericles himself died of the plague in 429 BC, whereas Thucydides caught it but survived).

Thucydides gives a general account of the early stages of the plague – its likely origins in north Africa, its spread in the broader regions of Athens, the struggles of the doctors to deal with it, and the high mortality rate of the doctors themselves.

Nothing seemed to ameliorate the crisis – not medical knowledge or other forms of learning, nor prayers or oracles. Indeed, “in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things”.

He describes the symptoms in some detail – the burning feeling of sufferers, stomach-aches and vomiting, the desire to be totally naked without any linen resting on the body itself, the insomnia and the restlessness.

The next stage, after seven or eight days, if people survived that long, saw the pestilence descend to the bowels and other parts of the body – genitals, fingers and toes. Some people even went blind.

Thucydides provided a vivid account of a variety of ailments which afflicted the diseases. “Violent heats in the head; redness and inflammation of the eyes; throat and tongue quickly suffused with blood; breath became unnatural and fetid; sneezing and hoarseness; violent cough’ vomiting; retching; violent convulsions; the body externally not so hot to the touch, nor yet pale; a livid color inclining to red; breaking out in pustules and ulcers.” (2.49-2.50)

Words indeed fail one when one tries to give a general picture of this disease; and as for the sufferings of individuals, they seemed almost beyond the capacity of human nature to endure. Those with strong constitutions survived no better than the weak.

Thucydides further described patients whose fever was so intense that they preferred to be naked than wear any clothing which

Thucydides also focuses on the breakdown in traditional values where self-indulgence replaced honour, where there existed no fear of god or man. As for offences against human law, no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial and punished: instead, everyone felt that a far heavier sentence had been passed on him.

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touched their skin; some even preferred to be submerged in cold water. Thucydides observed that the ill were “tormented by an unceasing thirst” which was not satiated regardless of the amount of liquids consumed. Many of the sick found it difficult to sleep, instead, displaying a constant restlessness. Many of the sufferers died within 7-9 days from the onset of symptoms.

Moral Consequences of Plague

The most terrible thing was the despair into which people fell when they realized that they had caught the plague; for they would immediately adopt an attitude of utter hopelessness, and by giving in in this way, would lose their powers of resistance.

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Concluding Remarks

Thucydides offers us a narrative of a pestilence that is different in all kinds of ways from what we face. The full description of the plague in Book 2 lasts only for about five pages, although it seems so intense and enduring.

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The first outbreak of the plague lasted two years, after which it struck a second time, although with less virulence. When Thucydides picks up very briefly the thread of the epidemic a little bit later (3.87) he provides numbers of the deceased: 4,400 hoplites (citizen-soldiers), 300 cavalrymen and an unknown number of ordinary people. Nothing did the Athenians so much harm as this, or so reduced their strength for war.

The lessons that we learn from the coronavirus crisis will come from our own experiences of it. Reading Thucydides can help us perceive how much the ancients suffered. Thucydides offers

us a painful description of a city-state in a crisis that is as poignant and powerful now, as it was in 430BC.

While trying to reduce the pain, we cannot afford to panic, in spite of the intensity of the pain. We are called to be patient, waiting and hopeful. In spite of... Plague and pestilence have been with us from time immemorial! Though painful and tragic, we shall still overcome!

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Life as God's Most Sublime Gift

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The devastating spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has made most humans aware of the precariousness of life, a reality we have frequently taken for granted. Suddenly we feel overcome by a nagging feeling of helplessness. Everywhere we turn we only hear of the news of the menacingly advancing disease and the harrowing trail of suffering and death it has left behind. The brutal surge of the infection seems to spare no part of the world. In fact, the most affluent countries of the world, presumed to have been equipped with the most advanced health-care facilities, appear to be the most afflicted ones.

The ubiquitous reality of the lockdown has literally brought the world to its knees. Men and women who lived their lives with such intensity—many of whom often wished if only they could extend their days by a couple of hours more—now find their clocks moving at snail's pace! On the flipside it has given people time and opportunity to dwell on fundamental issues which our busy life had until now prevented us from paying any attention to. Social media platforms are awash with reflections that enlighten us on the enduring values that must undergird a healthy human life. While most people are convinced that our world will never be the same again post-Corona, some even think that Nature is getting back on us for the appalling harm we have been relentlessly inflicting on it.

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The Sublime Gift of Life

One thing that dominates a large number of ruminations is the focus on the gift aspect of life. While the Corona virus has managed to set the world on edge, humanity has become aware that our tall claims about technological advancement and breakthrough scientific discoveries sound so hollow when confronted with a challenge like the raging force of the fast-spreading pandemic. There is no vaccine to protect ourselves from it and there is no effective cure if we become infected by it. While faith-seekers contend that their lives are in the hands of God, those who think that belief in any transcendent power is a luxury they can ill afford simply throw up their hands and stare at a sky that is full of only satellites and comets! But people on both sides of the divide are now deeply convinced that the gift of life cannot at all be taken for granted.

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The Nirbhaya Case

Even as the whole human effort is currently focused on holding on to dear life, my thoughts go back to how our system worked overtime to snuff out precious life from the four young convicts of the infamous Nirbhaya case just a few weeks ago, on March 20 this year. It is surely politically incorrect to say anything in defence of those nefarious predators or their chillingly ghastly crime. True they were put through the due process and their criminal intent was proved through a prolonged legal battle. My disagreement is with the nature of the punishment given to them. A lot of people felt acutely outraged when those men through their lawyers went about

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resorting to one remedy after another to spare themselves from the finality of the death sentence. From review appeals to mercy petitions, the entire gamut of legal measures was run and perhaps exhausted before they were finally sent to the gallows. It was easy for us to condemn their delaying tactics, but we fail to remember they were fighting for their dear life.

People who spoke out against giving the capital punishment had understandably few sympathizers, even fewer supporters. Former Supreme Court judge, Justice Kurian Joseph, who publicly requested the authorities to transmute their punishment to life imprisonment, was ridiculed as a naïve follower of Jesus, who at one time studied for the priesthood. Senior advocate of the Supreme Court, Indira Jaisingh, was subjected to endless trolling for appealing to the victim's mother to forgive the murderers. At the end, the sticklers for the *lex talionis* (law of retaliation) of Hammurabi had their way and the four deeply anguished young men were done away with.

The mother of the unfortunate victim of the inhuman crime apparently expressed happiness at the case being brought to its desired conclusion and claimed that finally her daughter had got justice. One can understand a bitterly grieving mother's feelings, but the question of the quality of justice that she sought remains a moot point. Many of us think that retributive justice is more effective as a deterrent and more in keeping with the

Life is the most sublime of the gifts that we possess. God is the author of life and it is God's gratuitous gift to us. As the scenes currently unfolding before us prove it indisputably, we humans cannot gift life to anyone, cannot even safeguard it beyond a point.

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principles of law enforcement. But I think it is based on a rather primitive and unenlightened understanding of establishing true justice. For the emergence of a genuinely affirmative social system we must



rather have recourse to restorative justice. When a society chooses the path of restorative justice over against that of retributive justice, the healing touch that it imparts to the social system will be immensely more enduring. Its benefits will be for the long haul and will eventually be beneficial to even those siding with the victims.

Conclusion: God as the Sole Author of Life

Life is the most sublime of the gifts that we possess. God is the author of life and it is God's gratuitous gift to us. As the scenes currently unfolding before us prove it indisputably, we humans cannot gift life to anyone, cannot even safeguard it beyond a point. In a fit of anger an individual can snuff out another's life or a judicial system, after combing through labyrinthine evidences and by referring to flawless provisions of legal jurisprudence, can award the capital punishment to a convict. But all our individual and corporate resources put together cannot bring a dead man or woman back to life! It is indeed a sobering thought that humanity's resolute battle to contain the spread of the Corona virus should bring home to us.

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COVID-19: Invitation to Introspect and Manifest our Altruism

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For most of us living presently in the world, it is the first time to experience and grapple with a pandemic. I do not know whether we could regard ourselves as blessed or cursed ones to be part of this historical moment! We might have thought in December 2019 that COVID-19 is something to do with Wuhan, China, and perhaps we are pretty safe and never would face it so personally. We might have even read or heard of such pandemics in the remote history caused by brutal killers, example, *cholera* (8 Lakhs death toll in 1910-1911; 1 million from 1852-1860), *bubonic plague* (75-200 million death toll from 1346-1353), *smallpox* (an estimated 300 million people died from smallpox in the 20th century alone), *influenza* (killed 1 million since 1968; 20-50 million between 1918-1920), *HIV/AIDS* (killed more than 36 million people since 1981) etc.

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With this terrifying knowledge of pandemic history, it is obvious that one easily succumbs to dread, panic, distress and despair. At the same time, the same pandemic histories also reveal that it is not a time to be merely panicked but to accept it as the author of Ecclesiastes tells that "for everything there is season, and a time for every matter under heaven". In his words, especially pandemic is "a time to die, a time to weep, a time to mourn, a time to refrain from embracing, a time to lose, a time to keep silence." (Eccl 3:1-8). In this essay, although there are

many life casualties caused by COVID-19, I would like to approach COVID-19 as an invitation to introspect and manifest our altruism.

Altruism Authenticates Christian Life

Altruism is explained in Oxford dictionary as a principle of considering the welfare and happiness of others before one's own. In other words, it is to be unselfish or other-oriented. George Lobo enumerated four attitudes of the mature Christian conscience, i.e., it should be rational, autonomous, altruistic and responsible. While talking about altruistic attitude of conscience, he says "it is influenced by the needs and interests of one's fellowmen; it is able to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of others"¹.

Jesus gave his life as ransom for others. Therefore, Christian vocation/life is measured by the degree of our altruism, breaking of our self for building the other. But today unfortunately and ironically, we see many in this globalized world leading an individualistic and self-centred life. At this juncture, Coronavirus emphatically tells us to be altruistic to save humanity otherwise the damage and loss of life would be enormous. Let us see some of the meaningful ways in which we are and we could be altruistic at this time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Altruism in Knowing and Sharing Right Information

First of all, we need to get right information regarding coronavirus from a reliable source about its nature, symptoms, precautionary

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measures and treatment. The same we have to share with others. We are bombarded with Himalayan piles of rumours in the social media related to COVID-19. We ought to be altruistic to verify the credibility of the information and then share with others. Unnecessary and unfounded messages we should not pass to others in order to avoid putting them in panic and dread. We could exercise our altruism by sharing the right information to the people who have no access to them, especially the illiterate, children, etc.

Altruism in Personal Quarantining

It has been authoritatively declared that we could avoid the spread of coronavirus if we remain socially distanced from others. We are advised to stay at home and come out only for very necessary purposes, like, to buy provisions, to visit medical doctor or buy medicine, etc. For a modern people who are used to going out and mingling more with friends than family members, it would be really difficult to remain at home quarantined. Even though it's difficult and we dislike, yet by keeping ourselves quarantined and maintaining adequate hygiene (washing of hands and wearing suitable mask) we manifest concretely altruism.

Altruism in Sharing the Resources with the Needy

In this time of pandemic crisis, those who are rich could buy the essential commodities to eat and rest peacefully. But the poor daily labourers and even among them the migrant workers are terribly affected by the implementation of 144 and sudden nationwide lockdown. They have no money to buy food because they have no work. They wanted to be at least united with their family members in their native villages but they have no transport facilities to reach respective places. They are stranded helplessly without shelter and food and many of them died while walking to their places². Of course, the Central and State governments have taken some measures to aid them but

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we not know how much effectively these helps reach them. Altruism demands that at least in our vicinity we do our best to feed the hungry and feel solidarity with people who are stranded in the streets.

Altruism in Prayer

Prayer is a powerful means of expressing our intimate relationship with God as our own “Father” or “Mother” and experiencing God’s Goodness (cf. Mt. 7:11) and Power (cf. Mk. 9: 29). This God is not indifferent to our present suffering, nor pandemic be interpreted primarily as God’s wrath and punishment for our sins. For Catherine LaCugna writes: “The God who does not need nor care for the creature, or who is immune to our suffering, does not exist... The God who keeps a ledger of our sins and failings, the divine policeman, does not exist³.”

We do not pray merely for our own protection from COVID-19 but we pray for the entire humanity with a sense of altruism. We could with firm faith and hope recite the prayer composed beautifully and circulated by Pune Diocese: “O God, in this time of the coronavirus we turn to you in trust and hope. you are ever full of mercy, compassion and love towards us. We ask you, loving Father, to be merciful to us and in your divine power take away from all over the world, this grievous pandemic of coronavirus. Inspire all authorities to take effective measures to contain the disease. Help us to be alert and vigilant against corona virus and to follow all guidelines and

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directions. You redeemed and saved us through the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. Help us not be discouraged but to believe and hope that you will bring good out of this evil. Father let your victory and glory shine through this deadly disease. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Altruism in Caring for Sick

Probably during the times of pandemic, we would usually dread to come closer to any sick or aged person, and care for them. The natural tendency for self-preservation might overwhelm us. Of course, we are instructed to maintain social distance strictly with the COVID-19 contracted persons, but not with all the sick. However, if nobody else is present to nurse and care for the sick, we need to care for them prudently even if it were to be a COVID-19 victim, although it involves risks. Altruism urges us to do the needful within our capacity for the sick as Good Samaritan did in the parable (Lk. 10: 25-37).

Altruism in Accepting Simple Life-Style

Generally altruistic persons do not give gorgeous appearance of themselves and would not choose to feast while his/her neighbour is in distress or turmoil. They live a simple life. The coronavirus spread has made all of us not to go to malls, gyms, cinema theatres, stadium, tourist places, bars and restaurants. For those who are used to such places it would be hard. At this pandemic moment, altruism insists that we do not regret for lack of entertainments or get annoyed/bored for remaining at home. With regard to consumption, our life-style ought to exemplify sparingness which we (church leaders) preach to others, as necessary in order that so many millions of hungry people throughout the world may be fed⁴.

Conclusion

Although deadly and mysterious COVID-19 has brought tremendous havoc in terms of so many increasing numbers of

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death tolls and standstill of the global community, yet it provides an opportunity to investigate our altruistic attitude. If we just continue to do things selfishly, we would contribute for the greater destruction of the humanity. On the contrary, if we act with the sense of altruism and solidarity with humanity, we certainly save many lives. Hence, it is time for us to act as Jesus, our Good Shepherd, did “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Altruism, if need to be, accepts sacrificing one’s own life but never jeopardizes other’s life. Altruism acts in consonance with selfless love of our neighbours. Our love of neighbour is to understood as nothing but our love of God itself. “Each of the manifold ways we are sacrificing to love our neighbours-- self-isolation, quarantining, tending to the sick at home, supporting first responders, avoiding public places, not hoarding supplies, working remotely and even not going physically to church buildings-- is itself an expression of our love of God⁵.” Thereby COVID-19 pandemic could be seen as an opportunity to strengthen our discipleship with Jesus: “By this (altruistic attitude and acts) everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35).

¹ George V. Lobo, *Christian Living: According to Vatican II* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1999), 293.

² David Gilbert, “Dropping Dead After Walking Hundreds of Miles During Coronavirus Lockdown”, accessed on 1st April 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qjd5z5/people-in-india-are-dropping-dead-after-walking-hundreds-of-miles-during-coronavirus-lockdown.

³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 397.

⁴ Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (1971). # 48.

⁵ Daniel P. Horan, “For the Love of God (literally), Stay Home, and Be Safe and Pray” in *National Catholic Reporter* accessed on 2nd April 2020 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/love-god-literally-stay-home-be-safe-and-pray?clickSource=email>.



Coronavirus: A Cruel Wakeup Call to Humanity?

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The novel coronavirus was heard of in some part of the universe was originally thought to be distant.¹ Caught unawares the virus from virtual turned into reality as it was near home. Evidently unprepared, as this was an uncharted practical health dilemma that was nowhere in hindsight. Grappling with the acute unavailability of health infrastructure and medical aid globally, treatment was bleak for the influx of persons suffering, with no ray of hope, even as of today.² Adding to this outbreak of illness is the predicament of patients to be left on their own to die of suffering and shame; for no fault of theirs. “Death was a community occurrence in the past.”³ Not anymore!

Patients dying of COVID-19, die alone and lonely. As death for many has been sudden and instant it has left families grappling with the reality of the sudden demise and broken hearted as they have been robbed of the opportunity to pay their last respects for their dead loved ones.⁴

The Alarming Situation

Is this a wakeup call for all humanity, considering the change that has engulfed the ethical perspective of the rational cognition? It may rightly be thought so. The following instances are heart-breaking:

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- The plummeting environmental degradation due to the increase in the universal population has invaded the natural ecosystem. The anthropocentric behaviour towards the biosphere wherein humans have begun to consume it purposefully for their benefit and disregarding the cry of nature, indicates Vaclav Smil, a Czech-Canadian scientist and policy analyst. He adds that “most of these [genetic and viral] transformations can be traced to purposeful harvesting or destruction of the planet’s mass of living organisms and reduction”⁵
- Religion and caste discriminations leading to atrocities on the weak and vulnerable segment of society. Denouncing religions that might threaten those in power is a form of paternalistic political dominance. Countries like Syria, Korea, Somalia and many others are waging wars even as they realise that they are killing human lives leaving behind a large number of women, children and wounded without any livelihood. War sees a surging number of civilians that are affected.⁶ Waging wars for power, territorial gain, revenge and the age-old reason for economic gains is fiercely taking precedence all around us
- The economic disparity leads to the entrapment of the lower income groups that are deeply submerged in poverty. The rich thrive in their wealth, that is leading to clusters of the population that are the labour class, are almost used as slaves. The opportunities provided to the poor are negligible in number. The overconcentration of providing educational, professional and health facilities to the elite class is deeply harrowing the lives of those at the lowest strata of society. According to the ILO,⁷ forced labour has been of serious international worry since 1930.⁸
- Crimes have escalated in number in recent times. “In 2018, Tijuana, Mexico had the highest murder rate of any city in the world, with 138.26 murders per 100,000 population.”⁹ The number of criminals incarcerated is higher than ever before. Crimes are on the rise due to drug and alcohol usage, domestic violence, sexual harassment, one of the growing criminal trends are of persons suffering with anxiety, depression and job loss.

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- Human beings are losing intrinsic value of each other, as people have begun to feel that one can be replaced by another. This is visible with the increase in the number of divorces, children moving overseas for better professional gains, who most often don’t come back to their parents. Joint families turning into nuclear families, further more spouses living separately in different cities as their profession requires so. Communities are growing smaller.
- Health care is a far cry for those who cannot afford it. The poor receive little or no health facilities. Allocation of resources is the toughest choice that health care persons make. Today with the coronavirus cases rising, deciding who gets treated and who is left out is an ethical issue, with no right or wrong answer. “Health care can involve tragic choices, value conflicts, and a certain amount of technical knowledge”¹⁰

“Most of these [genetic and viral] transformations can be traced to purposeful harvesting or destruction of the planet’s mass of living organisms and reduction.” -Vaclav Smil

Call to Wake Up

Although vigorously prevalent, the above instances challenge us to ask into our own behaviour and perceive the reasons of human misbehaviour. There is the lack of sensitivity towards everything around. John Kavanaugh’s remark holds very true today, “It is the ability to take ownership of our responses to the world. Our engagement in the world is not automatic.”¹¹

With the ubiquitous influence of information and technology there is a decline between religion and people. Some believe that religion only gains its importance as people age.¹²

The digital age¹³ has more people turning agnostic. The one question that is often reiterated, “is religion helpful anymore?” This question raises doubts in the mind as people have lost faith

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in their religion. Some of these people having lost faith in their religion have turned to other religions or follow a different way of life and call it spiritual enlightenment.

With the advancement of science and technology humans were under the impression that every problem could be overcome with science. “Recent scientific developments teach us that even the material world is beyond our complete comprehension. Science struggles and stumbles in comprehending the world.”¹⁴

The pandemic disease has brought all humanity to their knees. People stopped praying for themselves, but now with the death toll rising to a frightening number to all corners of the earth, people are praying for each other, those that are suffering with the disease, and the family members of the bereaved. With no relief visible as of now, the constraints lie with us, as we combat the disease with whatever resources are available. So, the COVID-19 is a challenge to wake up and recognise our own humanity. It urges us to see each other as brothers and sisters. It invites us to look into the animals and plants as our own partners! It summons us to look after nature as our own “common home,” and not to exploit it. It counsels us to look into our values system and rediscover the beauty of sharing, collaboration and service, as opposed to greed, profit and egoism.

Concluding Challenge

As I conclude this article the one question that can be asked, why did we reach this far into a problem that is beyond the control of all the world’s researchers, physicians and politicians?

“Recent scientific developments teach us that even the material world is beyond our complete comprehension. Science struggles and stumbles in comprehending the world.”

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Did we get overconfident as the world was turning into a super nuclear power? We believed that we can endure all, as time would be on our side. This adversity has hit us like a tsunami against our theory, our problem is moving at a faster pace than we can deal with.

Thus, we can affirm that the outbreak of the disease is nature’s cruel answer to our misbehaviour.

As the virus has had the ability to nudge us out of our oblivion, and brought us into reality, our trust in religion will draw us back to our faith.

¹ Disease outbreak news. *Pneumonia of unknown cause – China*. World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/csr/don/05-january-2020-pneumonia-of-unknown-cause-china/en/> January 5, 2020. Accessed on March 30, 2020.

² Today’s date: March 30, 2020.

³ Scaria Kanniyakonil. *Wait for God’s Call Catholic Perspective on Euthanasia*. Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 2011. p.-106.

⁴ Sofia Bettiza. *Coronavirus: How Covid-19 is denying dignity to the dead in Italy*. “BBC World Service” <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-52031539>. Accessed on March 31, 2020.

⁵ Vaclav Smil. *Harvesting the Biosphere: What We Have Taken from Nature*, MIT Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/britishcouncilonline-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3339556>. Created from british councilonline- ebooks on 2020-03-31 09:23:37. Preface p.-VII.

⁶ Cameron Moore. *5 War. “Crown and Sword: Executive Power and the Use of Force by the Australian Defence Force”* ANU Press, Acton ACT, Australia, 2017, pp. 205–252. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zgwk12.10. Accessed 1 Apr. 2020.

⁷ International Labour Organisation is a part of the United Nations.

⁸ Rodger Doyle. *Modern Slavery*. “Scientific American” vol. 294, no. 1, 2006, pp. 30–30. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26061289. Accessed April 1, 2020.

⁹ Published by Statista Research Department January 28, 2020. *Crime and punishment around the world - Statistics & Facts*.

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All Things Work Together for Our Good

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Let us begin with a popular and insightful story! Once there was a famous king who had a wise minister who always looked at life with a positive attitude. For all that happens in life his constant reply would be “it is for good.” One day the king’s only son lost one of his fingers while playing with the knife. The minister on hearing the news told the king that “it is for good”. The king got enraged with this answer from the minister and immediately ordered the soldiers to put the minister into prison. And once again the reply of the minister was “it is for good.” After some days the king’s son went for hunting in the forest and to his bad luck, he was captured by the pagans who decided to offer him as a sacrifice to their deity. When they were about to slit his throat, they noticed that his finger was missing so they left him free. The king’s son reported the matter to the king that he was captured and released free because he missed his finger. The king remembered the words of the minister and brought him out from the prison and enquired why he said “it is for good” while he was put in prison? He said “if I was not put in prison, I would have accompanied the prince for hunting as usual and they would have sacrificed me instead of him.” This reply of the minister convinced the king that all things work together for good.

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https://www.statista.com/topics/780/crime/#dossierSummary__chapter_1 Accessed April 1, 2020.

- ¹⁰ Ed. Lisa A Eckenwiler. Felicia G. Cohn. *The Ethics of Bioethics Mapping the Moral Landscape*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2007. p.87.
- ¹¹ John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. *Who Count as Persons? Human Identity and the Ethics of Killing*. Georgetown University Press/ Washington, D.C. 2001. p.60.
- ¹² Alasdair Crockett. David Voas. *Generations of Decline: Religious Change in 20th-Century Britain*. “Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion” vol. 45, no. 4, 2006, pp. 567–584. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4621936. Accessed April 1, 2020.
- ¹³ IGI Global Publisher of Timely knowledge. <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/resource-sharing/7562>. Defines ‘Digital Age’ as: The time period beginning in the 1970s with the advent of the personal computers providing the technological capabilities to transfer information freely and quickly. This period is also called the information age. Accessed April 1, 2020.
- ¹⁴ Stephen Jayard Susainathan. “Enriching Science with the Dharma of Jesus: A Philosophy of Science Perspective. Dharma of Jesus”. *Jnanadeepa Pune Journal of Religious Studies*. Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune. July 2015. p.- 146

God's Ways Are Different from Ours

This simple story narrated above serves as an eye opener for us to look at life with eyes of faith. The holy Bible too explains to us of the fact that all things work together for good. We see this from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. St. Augustine hails the original sin as 'blessed' because it brought forth the Savior to the rest of humanity, while as others consider it as a curse. Even when Joseph was sold by his own brothers to the Egyptians, he was convinced that it was not his brothers who sent him to Egypt but God, in order to preserve their lives during famine (cf. Gen 45:5). We can't understand the mighty plans of God with our bare eyes but only with the eyes filled with faith can we come to realize that everything happens for our good.

The more human beings suffer, the more God's mercy and love abounds. We see in the book of Job, how he was abandoned by God to dust but finally was restored to health and wealth in double. Our God is an awesome God, his ways are mysterious. If Jesus, the Only Son of God did not undergo passion and death, the realization of our salvation would be impossible. Thus, our God who is very loving brings beautiful things out of the things that seem to be hopeless and turns everything for our good.

This conviction is not limited to Bible alone. When we apply this fact to the historical events like natural calamities, accidents, diseases and so on, we come to understand that God has a purpose behind all these. And when we realize this great truth, we become open to God's workings and thus we will be able to find the hidden meaning in these catastrophes. I would like to bring to our attention the situation of a village affected by the Tsunami 2014. We know that the millions of people suffered the loss of dear ones, their property and their all the belongings. We know all is not lost when everything seems to be lost. They are only a new beginning towards something good, better or sometimes even for something that is for best. The village that I was talking about was in a poor state with no basic facilities and with no proper living conditions before tsunami.

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No one cared that such a village existed. But today, thanks to the generosity of so many generous souls, the village is transformed into a beautiful place with proper houses and all basic facilities. It is just an amazing thing to visit that village now. Though there were many losses, God had his own plan to make us convince that all things work together for good. God's ways are different from ours. And it is always for the better!

Through the Eyes of Faith

It is true at present the whole world is passing through a painful period due to COVID-19, which has jeopardized the whole world of its economy, human resources, environment and so on. It has brought about a huge faith crisis. We are drawn to ask questions like: Is still God in control of history? Or is he enjoying the human miseries? Does God care for us? etc. It is quite natural that we are induced to ask such questions but at the same time we should also see the good things that this time of crisis brings to us. This crisis that we are facing today is certainly not a work of God but clinging onto God we can certainly overcome this crisis. We do acknowledge that this problem has done unimaginable harm to humanity. It has caused mind-boggling suffering to all of us. It is terribly bad. Still I would like to point out a few things as to how this present crisis can be a way to transformation if only, we can see it through the eyes of faith:

- It can bring about oneness in the family. An opportunity to spend more time for one another, to care and express one's concern for the other members in the family.

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Thus, our God who is very loving brings beautiful things out of the things that seem to be hopeless and turns everything for our good.

- It can turn the attention of the people from unwanted things like peer addictions, drugs, alcohol and make them to turn towards God.
- It can inspire the rich people to contribute to the needs of the poor.
- The distinction between the rich and poor are removed and brought into a balance.
- The environment has been brought into a peaceful atmosphere.
- The value of human life is emphasized, and a time to put into practice what one has been taught to value in life more.
- A time to retreat oneself from where one has fallen from the commitment in life.
- A time to reflect and contribute the capacity to think creatively and pen down in words the insights received.

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

Conclusion

Besides these, there can be many other ways how this corona virus period brings a positive outlook to glance through the eyes of faith. Every tragedy in life shakes our faith, brings confusion, pain and turmoil and uncontrollable tears but for a Christian who passes through these catastrophes with the eyes of faith, God turns everything for our good. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans says “we know that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Here St. Paul puts a condition that it is only for those who love God, God turns everything for good. As convinced Christians, we know that our God does not wait for our love. His love and compassion cannot be explored by us, his creatures. God is with us in this time of

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suffering and misery and he, for sure, will turn everything for our good. Let us have the patience to see all things work together for our good.





Family Bonding in Times of COVID-19

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Covid 19 pandemic has altered everyone's lifestyle today. Families have been faced with the challenge of establishing a 'new normal' in their daily lives. The current pandemic has resulted in loss of predictability, loss of loved ones, loss of routine, loss of classroom learning, and loss of exposure to space. Therefore, we are homebound. The families have to ride through this challenge to regain this real bond of love and union among family members. It's a new way of life for many families around the world but also an opportunity to strengthen familial bonds and enhance our relationship with God. It is not a loss or limitation with any kind of resentment but an invitation to rebuild our broken relationships in the families.

Digital Environment to Prayer Environment

Most families are affected by the digital environment which leads to loneliness, manipulation, exploitation, violence, the risk of addictions, isolations and gradual loss of contact within the family members (*Christus Vivit*, no. 88). But today family is called to be united in prayer in this growing fear of our vulnerable existence. The parents feel special need to inculcate in their children a desire for prayer, which was almost disappearing from families today. It is a time God has given to transmit to the children the Christian faith and the children emulate Christian faith through the good examples of their parents and grandparents. It is a time that children begin a journey of learning and deepening their faith. Highlighting this

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basic truth of Christian life Pope Francis says: "it is in the family that we first learn how to pray. There we come to know God, to grow into men and women of faith, and to see ourselves as members of God's greater family, the Church" (*Message to Families*, 18 January 2015).

Individualism to Interdependency

It is commonly remarked that society in general and marriage in particular are growing more individualistic: "an excessive individualism that sees the family as, at best, a "way station, helpful when convenient... and easily swept aside when it proves inconvenient or tiresome" (*Amoris Laetitia*, Chap. 2). Individualism weakens family bonds and ends up in leaving each member of the family as an isolated unit, meaning, spouses are now 'alone together.' This fosters an attitude of constant suspicion, fear of commitment, self-centeredness and arrogance. This lockdown due to covid -19 invites couples to transcend human frailties and to overcome hurts and frustrations often created by years of misunderstanding and negativity. A sense of trust must be deepened and supported through the risk of leaning on each other and finding the other trustworthy. *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us, such an attempt to develop a relationship of trust can only be attained through "unflinching effort under the help of grace." This moment of crisis enables the good communication between the spouses and helps to make family life more humane and can overcome ill-feelings towards each other.

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"It is in the family that we first learn how to pray. There we come to know God, to grow into men and women of faith, and to see ourselves as members of God's greater family, the Church." -Pope Francis

Regaining the Lost Love for the Elderly

Every Christian has a role to honor and care for the elderly. But the crude reality today is exactly the opposite; they are considered a burden in the family. Older people suffer not only by being deprived of human contact, but also from abandonment, loneliness and isolation. The time has come to begin working towards an effective change in attitude towards older people and to restore to them their rightful place in the family. As elderly parent faces the increasing loss of their freedoms, friends and identity and becomes more anxious and dependent, we need to let go of anything in our parent's journey that does not belong to us. We should tell our children that older people represent the "historical memory" of the younger generations. They are the bearers of fundamental human values. Where this memory is lacking, people are rootless; they lack any capacity to project themselves with hope towards a future that transcends the limits of the present. The family will benefit greatly from a reevaluation of the educational role of older people. Pope Francis said that grandparents were "the indispensable link in educating children and young people in the faith" (*Address*, 21 January 2020).

Grandparents are the "indispensable link in educating children and young people in faith."
Pope Francis

Youth Return to Home Space

The outbreak of corona-virus and the social distancing have affected the youth to stressful situations; no gatherings around, no dating possibilities, no entertainments etc. It is a U-turn from web space to home space. In this context, the message of Pope Francis to the youth is appropriate: "Open wide the doors of your life! May your time and space be filled with meaningful relationships, real people with whom to share your authentic and concrete experiences of daily life" (22 Feb 2018). It is a time to renew their faith they received from home; to revive the wise instructions of their parents; to give

due respect to their parents and grandparents and to give space to their brothers and sisters. The book of Proverbs teaches: "Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head and pendants for your neck" (1: 8-9).

Conclusion: Community Service/Social Activism

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, God provided us with ample opportunities to think beyond ourselves and more about our family as a whole. No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crisis, yet they are part of life: each problem or calamity whether manmade or natural, has a lesson to teach which will lead to a spirituality that upholds the family. In order to have a healthy family life, Pope Francis asks us to practice three words: *Please, Thank you and Sorry*. Covid-19 is a God-given opportunity and let's pledge to heed to the call of our Holy Father to exercise above three essential words as they are the key to living well and in peace both inside and outside our home (*General Audience*, World meeting of Families, 21-26 August 2018).



Globalized Virus: Taking Us Back to 1990

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The pandemic continues to expand. More than 175 countries and territories have reported cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Case growth has accelerated to more than 1300000 cases and 70,000 deaths as of April 6, 2020. Some geographies have a handful of cases, others with early community transmission have a few hundred, and those with uncontrolled, widespread transmission have tens of thousands. Governments have launched unprecedented public-health and economic responses. The situation evolves by the day.

The Economic Impact

The Coronavirus pandemic is the third shock to the Indian economy in a little over three years. The economy will not escape unhurt. More importantly, households are likely to be hit through loss of jobs and or earnings. The impact of such economic shocks on the labour markets is usually on the young who delay their entry into the labour market in response to a fall in job opportunities. This shows up in a fall in the labour force participation rate. And, quite perversely, leads to a fall in the unemployment rate.

Measuring the unemployment rate during a countrywide lockdown is like measuring water in the ocean. Water, water everywhere / nor any drop to drink. That was from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. Today, people are stuck in their homes surrounded by empty factories, warehouses, offices and shops everywhere. There are empty job seats everywhere, not any

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to gain. This in a way leads to the deterioration of household activities. Especially the low-income group get affected the most and the earliest. 21 days lockdown can save the face of government putting responsibility on individuals for the pandemic but how one's need can be satisfied. One's own identity as an earning member in the family is being questioned, that can be (Parenthood, sisterhood, brotherhood and the like).

The interesting fact about the current scenario is that we are back to 1990s; social distancing has put an end to globalization.

1991 marked the great change for Indian economy as well as the lives of Indians. Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization changed us dramatically as the lives of Indians have thrived to the peak of consumerism; globally noted because of our potentiality and educated population. All of these things have come to a standstill with the arrival of the unexpected globalized virus. Though globalization of such virus was unknown to many. There are cases which proves that quite many were aware of such pandemic or the pandemic in the making. This could be termed as a "Third World War" because of the lives we spare and the damage it causes globally and locally.

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End of Globalisation?

The coming era will be known for its cold war between countries and much stronger trade wars which can emerge. From a business perspective and economic perspective first thought which can emerge in the minds of the individuals could be this, how can I make use of the situation for growth, purely a profit motive-oriented thinking. At this crucial time only very,

few do have the resources to think in those lines. The collapse of nations and businesses are far beyond any recent crisis.

As a layman in the field of medicine, current knowledge of mine about COVID-19 is inadequate. Even WHO makes conflicting statements and UN is seen nowhere. Every day I am bombarded with 'n' number of opinions and suggestions about COVID-19 but challenging to make out the truth of each of this. I am not sure whether it is thick and thin of globalized village. Though everything seems to be difficult in the coming days, the present scenario opens up a new dimension for all operations in the world.

The interesting fact about the current scenario is that we are back to 1990s; social distancing has put an end to globalization and I see a further drop in coming days. The economic as well as other fields of study grips with fear. This fear induces slowdown, recession and crisis. But this time it is a factual truth because this is fear of death. This fear is the worst fear than all the previous financial as well as economic crisis. None of the economics can escape from this grip. End of this fear is distancing oneself as well as one's own economics from others. Social distancing within an economy and social distancing from economies also; that is the end of globalization.

Brexit and winning of Trump had proved that globalization has reached its peak and is starting to deteriorate. Then the latest trade war between China and America also points fingers to this. The emergence of this virus rang the death bell for globalization. Our lives also have got influenced by globalization and end of this will

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between world and the next. We can choose to walk through this with hatred, prejudice and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies. Or can choose to walk leaving them behind for a better world.

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throw many from their livelihood. If this scenario persists widening gap between rich and poor can go higher and higher. The aspect of charity work done by corporates and individuals can turn out to be a compulsory aspect in society; otherwise no one might be ready to do it.

Humanity has experienced Spanish Flu, Plague and Cholera as global epidemic and survived through these difficult times. Then what marked the difference at that point of time is the lack of globalization, which could restrict the spreading. As individuals in the globalized village, anything and everything affects us. It doesn't spare anything even the belief system of the individuals. An infected person will be a stigma to the world. Better to get rid of the same individual for the betterment of society. But the goodness of humanity is not dead. We still see people risking their life for making others better, risking their life to make the world a better place to live.

Concluding Challenge

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between world and the next. We can choose to walk through this with hatred, prejudice and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies. Or can choose to walk leaving them behind for a better world. Lockdown has shown as a possible coexistence of all facts of life. But how are we going to act out after this seems to be a major risk? Mostly we try our level best to repeat history.

Selfless, Sacred Service: A Story of Gratitude

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“Hurry up” it is a hotspot for the virus. 22 March, 2020...All journalistic eyes and television cameras were focused on Pune City. I rushed to the airport as 6E 553 Indigo flight was ready to take off. ‘Please have your seat, Sir’ said the Airhostess. I got perplexed. All had covered their mouths with masks and hands with gloves. That was the fear of Corona that was slowly mounting. Yes, this virus was getting the popularity but not more than Madhya Pradesh political gimmick!!

Flight landed in Calcutta airport and at the entrance I was stopped at a heavy iron gate. A voice said, “Those from Maharashtra and Kerala, please stand in line”. I said to myself, “Thank God, this time I have not been identified with the religion but the state.” With a broad smile, I said, “Excuse me, Ma’am, I’ve arrived from Maharashtra.” To my utter surprise and confusion, she ran away from me crying, “Don’t come near!!”

Quarantine

A nurse came running faster, than an ambulance, and the next moment I had a machine placed on my forehead and my hand was marked ‘QUARANTINE’. Just within a blink of the eye everything happened.

I smiled and entered the quarantine. There were already hundreds inside. I heard a ‘quarantine’ saying, “Where else will we get better meals than this?” He stared at me like a hungry tiger and emptied

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his plate. I understood they are happier to be quarantined than go to the bed hungry.

An hour ago the Lockdown had been announced. It is 26 March 2020, and I happened to read Isaiah 26:20: “Go home, my people and lock your doors hide yourself for a little while until the Lord’s anger has passed”. I said, “Wow Amazing!!”

Schools and offices are closed, malls and markets are empty, events are called off, roads are deserted, flights are grounded, economy is down, and even international boards are closed. People are scared even to look at each other, forget about touching.

I was behind the collapsible gate. After a few days, I heard a voice calling “Mr Saldanha?” I looked around to meet the eyes of a nurse staring at me. I responded “Yes?” “Sir, you need to undergo a blood test in Columbia Asia Hospital. You need to be admitted since you have tested positive for COVID19.” The news was a bombshell!! “I? Positive for...?”

So many nurses came and went. Poking needles, stuffing me with tablets. Tests one after the other and my body was getting shudders.

The New Mother Teresas

Days passed. I saw many nurses and doctors working 24x7. Among them was an old nurse with a radiant face, Alisha by name. Admitted in the city where St. Mother Teresa rests and prays for us, I saw a new Mother Teresa in her!

When she came near me, I appreciated her work. She just replied, “Get well soon”. “Oh. I have found saint in a sinner.” “What?” she exclaimed! “Yes, when I see you in this white dress... Your work and care remind me of St Mother Teresa.”

A moment passed and I felt a drop of water on my hand. It was not too long when I realized that it was her tear, rolled down

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from her cheek. I was confused and apologized for making a statement like that. “Mr Saldanha”, she said, “You must rest now. See you in the morning.”



“Don’t stick to one patient,” was the shout of a matron, almost exploding my ears. She disappeared from my sight. I said to myself, “In this strange situation, I see a finger of God leading me to remember saints.”

The next day I asked her the reason for her tears, because I had lost my sleep the whole night trying to figure out why.

She said, “Nurses are scorned for being late with medicines, even when they are holding their bladder because they don’t have time to use the restroom, even when they are starving because they skip meals, being peed on, puked on, bled on, yelled at... and kept far from their families while taking care of the patients.” She continued, “I am missing my family for the past one month. I am not frightened to get infected so that all of you shed off the virus.”

“Saldanha, Norohona, Aranha and Corona all belong to the same family so corona will not affect my body.” I said jokingly. She smiled.

I switched on my mobile and went to the official site www.covid19india.org. It was shocked to know that cases are exponentially increasing each passing day and people are finding it difficult to get one square meal.

I asked with trembling voice “Why Lord, why this?” I remembered my brother, who taught me an action song ‘*Ghuma, Ghuma ke maara*’. The second line follows ‘*David ne Goliath ko ek pathar se maara*’. I used to have a good laugh. How is it possible to win a war with one stone?!

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Today no more can I laugh. If a virus, which my naked eyes can’t see can kill thousands of people, why not a stone?

The whole night I saw the sky and heard a voice saying “You have been destroying me day after day. In the name of development, you have destroyed my beauty, you have chased and killed all the animals, destroyed fertile lands by mining, polluted the waters and the environment with your toxic gases... Aren’t you satisfied? You wretched human beings! Remember, my death will be your death...” There and then, I resolved, that I should do something for the people and mother earth.

Service with a Smile

The next day doctor told me with a broad smile, “Congrats, you have recovered! Mr. Saldanha and Corona are friends. You are stronger than the Corona!” Once the formalities over, I happily came out of the hospital. But something I missed. Yes, Alisha. I ran back to say ‘Thank you’ to her. My heart came to my mouth... to see her resting on ‘my bed’. She had been tested positive for COVID-19. But no fear or regrets seemed to cross her face. Rather she is happy to say bye. I continued my visit to the hospital.

Today I am sitting and recalling all these incidents in front of her coffin. Jesus sacrificed his life for the humanity. Mother Teresa for the poor and marginalized and Alisha for the Selfless Sacred Service for the Corona patients! That too with a Smile!

Now as this Mother Teresa rests in this wooden box, I can see the same radiance on her face. An angel she is! An angel with white dress! She has fought the fight and won the race.

I said “Thank You Alisha for your Selfless Sacred Service.” *Tick Tick*. I saw my WhatsApp and the message read, ‘Let us see some more humans like Mother Teresa and St Aloysius Gonzaga in our world’. [Please note that this narrative is partly fictional, to protect identity of the characters.- Ed]

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Walking Hundreds of Miles under the Cloud of COVID-19

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A lifeless but an invisible novel corona virus has shattered the rhythm of daily life in our interconnected global village. The threat of this invisible has become invincible due to lack of vaccine to prevent COVID-19. Consequently, an enforced and effective social distancing at the sphere of social life, and washing one's hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap-water or alcohol-based hand rub at the personal level seem to be the current mode of preventing the spread of novel corona virus, and protecting oneself. This has led many governments around the globe opt for national or regional lockdowns for varying periods of time. The Indian government, following the practice prevalent at the present international scenario enforced a nationwide three-week-long lockdown on 25 March 2020.

A Bold Step, But ...

The declaration of national lockdown—a bold step in the right direction—to contain the spread of coronavirus pandemic, that has devastated more than 230 countries around the globe, has led unfortunately to an unprecedented exodus of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from various cities and towns in India. On the one hand, it made clear that the economic activities related to unorganized sectors depend on movement and migration, but on the other, it brought to the fore the vulnerability of thousands of millions of migrant workers in India.

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The Plight of the Migrant Workers

In the wake of the government's twenty-one days national lockdown, the migrant workers—women, men and children—had no option but to set out on foot from cities, their temporary worksites, for their “homes” in villages thousands of miles away. They were walking down on national and state highways in the past week

The migrant workers' exodus from the big cities driven by the fear of the novel corona virus “has made them a lot more visible in the national discourse”.

hungry and thirsty, tired and exhausted, blisters on their feet and yet their young ones on their shoulders and bags perched on their heads. Some of them were forcefully doused with disinfectant, upon crossing the state borders. More than two scores of people died on their way and a couple of them were burnt in the forest fires on the border between states.

Ramachandra Guha, an eminent historian of India, lamented at the flight of the migrant workers, “Those who build our cities, houses, hospitals, hotels, multiplexes and do lots of things that make our lives in middle class urban India comfortable are neither an administrative nor societal priority”. They were going home, which they left in search of a better life, in hundreds and thousands with tormenting hearts about their bleak future ahead of them. They were walking on the roads towards their distant homes, because they were left without daily wages, food, temporary shelters and security in their worksites, the big cities. They were fleeing away, in a time of unprecedented crisis and uncertainty caused by an inexplicable fear of the novel corona virus—fear of getting infected or spreading the infection, anxiety and concerns about their families thousands of miles away—from their economic

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insecurity and social anonymity in the cities in search of their original nests that provided an emotional and scanty economic security.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said on 02 April, that the plight of the millions of internal migrants in the wake of the ill-planned national lockdown imposed to contain COVID-19 outbreak in India, should not “exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities”. While appreciating the subsequent measures taken by the ruling regimes, she was categorical in asserting that “pervasive changes still remain to reach out to the most vulnerable sectors” of Indian society.

As per the Centre’s report submitted to the Supreme Court of India towards the fall of March 2020, there are more than 4.14 crores migrants in different states, but the actual number will be much higher. The millions of migrant workers were the life-line of the unorganized sector, which keeps the Indian economy buzzing. Their numbers have been growing in the last decades but their lives remain precarious infected with myriad of miseries. They have no social security, no contracts and other benefits in their worksites. Their exodus from the big cities driven by the fear of the novel corona virus “has made them a lot more visible in the national discourse”. Thanks to the state governments who under the directive from the Centre have quarantined the migrant workers in make-shift shelters for two weeks in order to prevent the movement of people across state borders and curb the spread of the new virus and prevent transmission in the villages far-off from the international and national airports.

“Those who build our cities, houses, hospitals, hotels, multiplexes and do lots of things that make our lives in middle class urban India comfortable are neither an administrative nor societal priority”.-
Ramachandra Guha

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Lack of Political Voice and Agency

The national lockdown triggered by the fear of new corona virus has made bare the despair and abject powerlessness of the migrant workers, and the best kept secret, “policy and data gaps on migrant workers”. Although they have been part of the Indian cityscape for decades now, their near “invisibility in official statistics” kept them and their utter poverty and powerlessness away from the decision-making tables at the national and state levels. The migrant workers remain invisible to political and administrative structures because they are not registered voters in the cities. They remain invisible in their own constituencies also because they are thousands of miles away from there. Divya Varma and Divya Ravindranath, renowned migration scholars, pointed it out in one of their articles of 2019, “Devoid of voting rights in the urban destinations that they [migrants] help build with their labour, their lives are stripped of any form of political voice or agency.”



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The migrant workers in unorganized sectors due to their informal status in the places of their labour could not avail the benefits provided under the public welfare policies. Their poverty and vulnerability mantle those who hire them with a culture of impunity, a culture that has no space for any obligation towards them, except a low wage. The Indian Health Ministry’s recent statement stated that the migrants are “the most marginalized section of the society who are dependent on daily wages for their living, and in times of such distress need sympathy and understanding of the society”. The unprecedented exodus of millions of migrant workers triggered

by the national lockdown to contain COVID-19, gives us a clarion call that their human dignity is sacred; their rights and privileges have not only to be respected in the texture of everyday life but must be constitutionally protected, and justice must be seen realized and experiential in their fragile lives away from their homes.

Conclusion: Plea for New Forms of Hospitality, Fraternity and Solidarity

Certainly, there will be and should be celebrations as the corona virus pandemic recedes in the coming months, but the disturbing images of millions of migrants workers, who were not scared to walking thousands of miles on our roads, should orient us towards the task ahead, as John Gray, a political philosopher, articulated, “to build economies and societies that are more durable, and more humanly habitable, than those that were exposed to the anarchy of the global market”. While speaking of the link between catastrophe and faith, Heribert Butterfield in his book, *Christianity and History* (1949) said: “the pandemic has humbled the country and opened millions of eyes to this risky universe once more.” The corona virus pandemic calls us to create space for, as Pope Francis said, “new forms of hospitality, fraternity and solidarity” (*Urbi et Orbi* on 27 March 2020).

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The Coronian Pride: The Existential Soliloquy of Corona

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I (Corona) am the crown of the world. Human beings are no more the summit of the world. I am something and human beings are nothing. Human beings dread at my sight. Their power, ego, energy, strength, capacity, achievement, and qualification are nothing before me. As I rule, all human beings tremble. In my regime, all human beings feel scary and frightful.

Social Distance

My existence has shaken their very being, their very existence. At my might there are weak. It looks human beings can find no way out. They have given in totally to my rule. Now, I have become their greatest adversary. They have all kinds of anger and frustration against me. They want to kill me. They want to destroy me. They are trying to annihilate me. But in vain!

Human beings have manufactured most powerful weapons, arms and ammunitions but all of them are rendered useless before my sight; no weapon can destroy me. Human beings have become absolutely helpless. They are nervous; they live in constant anxiety, tension and worry. They ask: When do you leave us? But, I cannot leave human beings. I am human

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friendly. Human beings are most comfortable shelter and nest for me. I find no other hamlet than human beings. I will rule the human world. I will control human beings.

I know human beings are social beings. As social beings, they come together, live together and eat together. But today, I have become a threat to their social life. Human beings were greeting each other with casual hand shake and now with my arrival shake hand has become a forgone gesture. Human beings were comfortably eating and socializing in the restaurants, open places and exchanging their happiness and joy. With my advent, everything has come to stand still. I have become a stumbling block to their social life. Now I govern them with a rule of social distance.

The Lonely and Masked Existence

The word “Lockdown” so far rarely used, has become a daily word. Ever since I took control of the world, nations, states, villages are all submitted to the law of lockdown. Oh yeah, today I take pride in teaching humans a new word and through it a new world in which they have to live.

Men were conscious of their handsomeness and women of their beauty. They used to go to beauticians and aesthetic clinics and spend a lot of time for a fairy tale looks and self-admirations. But with my sway, men and women have totally withdrawn themselves from these so called good looking activities and are content with their natural appearance.

Human beings could identify each other face to face easily from a distance. But today my dominion amidst them has masked their identity. Their natural beauty is hidden. Their appearance is vizard or a disguise. There is no one to appreciate their beauty. No one to commend about their personality. Everyone has become a masked reality. The natural is hidden. I have masked their real beauty.

Human beings had manifold food habits. They were happy and elated with this part of their life. Ever since my arrival, they have

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found decadence in food; they look no more for the variety contained “menu card”. They live in a constant fear of morrow’s sustenance. My rule over them has made their movements swift to hunt for the livelihood. People have changed their lifestyle from multiple to scanty.

Conclusion: The Crown of the World

Today, I am proud to say that I could create trepidation in every human person. The most powerful persons in the world are living in burrows. They feel safe nowhere. If they go home, I am there, If they go to office I am there, If they try to run in the waters, I am there. If they go abroad, I am there. People are simply caught within themselves; they do not have an inch of courage to peep out. All people in the world, rich and poor, haves and have not’s, rulers and the ruled, white and black, yes, all have become feeble and defenseless. Their life is paralysed; all human beings are confused. They want to put an end to my reign but they have not yet succeeded. I remain as the crown of the world. I am CORONA. The proud one! Challenging yours!.



“How Long to Wait?” Patience as the Key at Crisis – Corona and the Story of Job

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Faced with the miserable crisis of Corona virus, we are rendered uncertain, fearful, desperate and suspicious. Once again crops up the age-old question: Why is there evil in the world, if God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent? We ask the question: Why should humanity suffer under such a contagious disease? We have never found, nor would we be able to find a conclusive answer to this question. A crisis like this Corona pandemic once again exposes our ‘ignorance’ in spite of all the claimed and acclaimed enlightenment and advancement. We don’t and we cannot lessen the esteem and value of the knowledge about reality acquired through science. And yet, everything proves insufficient at a moment like this. We cannot do much about this crisis except watching, waiting, praying and supporting one another.

Our predicament reminds us of and relates us to the biblical character Job. Just like Job, we are all undergoing a crisis having no idea about the why of it. Now let us spend a few minutes reflecting on the different stages Job went through at the time of his suffering and see if it is going to help us to cope with our situation. The spread of the Corona-Pandemic happens in stages as happened Job’s misery. These two can be compared indirectly:

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| Job’s Misery | Corona Pandemic |
|--|--|
| Remote scene in heaven in which God empowers Satan to harm Job’s possessions (Job 1:6-12) | December 2019: The news of a new Virus breakout far away from us in Wuhan in China |
| Job loses his riches and his children (Job 1:13-22): Job loses first his oxen and servants (v 15), second his sheep and servants (v 16), third his camels and servants (v 17) and fourth his sons and daughters (vv 18-19). Job’s Reaction (vv 20-22): Job is upset, yet he accepts the losses as ‘will of God’ and does not charge against God. Remains faithful to God in whom he believes. | February 2020: The Corona Virus has reached Iran, Italy and Spain, infecting thousands of them and killing people in large numbers, then it reached other European countries. In USA it is infecting hundreds of thousands of the people and kills thousands of them. General Reaction: It is terrible! God save them all! Let us not worry too much about it. We are not yet affected. The virus will get killed in the Indian heat and will not affect us so badly! |
| Job loses his health (Job 2:6-9): With full of sores on his body, scratching himself with a potsherd and cursed by his wife. Job’s Response (Job 2:10). One should be ready to receive from God the bad as well. | March 22: A 14-hour curfew in India. Now it is next doors. Fear and uncertainty strengthened. Our Response: We trust in God and He will help us to overcome this pandemic! |

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The story continues. Job is visited by his three friends and initially they do the right thing by sitting with Job on the ground for seven days and seven nights without uttering a word (Job 2:13). After these seven days and seven nights Job breaks the silence and begins to curse his birth. This is the first moment of his impatience. As adding fuel to the fire, each of Job’s three friends deliver three theological speeches each (Job 4:1-27:23) seeking a causative justification to Job’s suffering. This unsettles Job further and he becomes rebellious accusing God of handling him unjustly and ends up demanding a just trial by God: “let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!” (31:6). Job has actually become absolutely impatient. He wants to know why an innocent person like him should suffer. Even the four speeches of Elihu (Job 32:1-37:24)

who tries to convince Job that Job ‘speaks without knowledge and his words are without insight’ (Job 34:35) fail to convince him of God’s just ways (Job 34:10-15). Finally, only a direct speech by God himself (Job 38:1-41:26) reveals Job’s ignorance to him, after which he is able to surrender himself to God admitting that he uttered what he did not understand, things too wonderful for him, which he did not know (Job 42:3).

Job started off well. However, as the redemption from his misery got delayed he became more and more impatient and went to the extent of questioning the very foundations of his life, his faith and his relationships. Now we too experience a delay. There is not yet an anti-biotic nor any vaccination which can be used against or protect us from this virus. We too are tempted to become impatient and question the foundations on which we have built our life and relationships. Yet, delays are not to be understood as denials.

We too are tempted to become impatient and question the foundations on which we have built our life and relationships. Yet, delays are not to be understood as denials.

On Saturday, 14th March 2020, at the spread of this virus in many of the western countries, said Zimbabwe’s defence minister Oppah Muchinguri, speaking at a rally in the northern town of Chinhoyi in Zimbabwe, “Coronavirus is the work of God punishing countries who imposed sanctions on us.”¹ Such negative approaches and attitudes express the sheer helplessness and ill-feelings and would only worsen the menace. At this moment of the crisis, no fault-

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findings, no false consolations, no grumbling, no justifications neither theological nor philosophical, are going to bring us further.

Pope Francis compares the Corona crisis to the great windstorm of Mark 4:37 and rightly asserts that this storm “exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties” and “In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.”²

“In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.”- Pope Francis

With the Corona-Pandemic we have all been thrown into a similar situation like that of Job. The only right thing that happened at Job’s crisis was the accompaniment of his three friends during the first seven days and seven nights. The Corona crisis also demands a similar type of solidarity and reveals that we all belong together. This crisis has rendered most of our social, economic, intellectual and religious statuses and stratifications meaningless. The meaningful thing that we could now do is first to watch and wait patiently and then make efforts to reach out a helping hand to those who are affected.

So let us be patient, patient till the end.

Let us express our solidarity by maintaining sufficient distance.

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Let us restrict our movements to our own families and communities.

And let us persevere in our prayers for ourselves and for all those who are affected, especially, those whose immediate future is endangered.

¹ <https://gulfnews.com/world/africa/zimbabwe-minister-coronavirus-gods-punishment-for-west-1.70401945> published on 15 March 2020 and accessed on 30.03.2020.

² Pope Francis, Extraordinary Moment of Prayer, Sagrato of St Peter's Basilica, Vatican, 27 March 2020.



Love in the Time of Corona

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I just wanted the title to rhyme with the Marquegian masterpiece. A more apt title would be “God, the Unconditional Love, and meaning of human suffering in the time of Corona pandemic and Global recession.” As of now, 1.2 million people are infected by the pandemic globally. The logarithmic graph on the web page of ‘worldometer’ shows no sign of its decline. In one month’s time, the virus can reach ten-fold. We do not know how and when the pandemic is going to end. Many countries are under a total or partial shutdown. IMF has made a prediction that the virus’ fall-out will lead to a financial meltdown ‘way worse’ than the global financial crisis a decade ago. Humankind is facing an unprecedented global crisis.

”Why does God allow suffering?” would be ‘the question’ that disturbs the minds of believers and skeptics alike at this moment. This ‘problem of evil’ is originally attributed to the Greek philosopher Epicurus. If God is omnipotent and merciful, how can there be evil!!! We can blame humans for moral evils like rape, murder and theft. But whom can we blame for physical evils like

“The first step towards wisdom is the realization that the laws of the universe do not care for us.” Steven Pinker. But God does!

earthquake, flood and pandemic? Epicurus may stand up from his grave and scream at the faithful for vindicating God at the face of suffering. The truth is that there is no convincing answer to the problem of evil. We simply do not know. We come to this deadlock because we take the wrong approach.

Natural Calamities as Part of Nature

As Steven Pinker (2019) says in *Enlightenment Now*, “the first step towards wisdom is the realization that the laws of the universe do not care for us.” But God does! Volcanic eruptions, flood and epidemics are natural events or occurrences. These calamities had been happening on planet earth even before we humans were born 3.5 million years ago. There was a time when the planet earth was a volcanic furnace. Tectonic plate movements carved the continents. Seismic activities will continue to shake the earth as long as it exists. Viruses appeared on the planet 1500 million years ago. They are among the oldest ancestors of life. As depicted in *Guns, Germs and Steel* by Jared Diamond (2008), the Eurasians were prone to Virus attacks from animals for a very long time. Slowly they gained immunity to many of the viruses and acquired an upper hand over some other human races which were not as immune to the viruses as the Eurasians. Still, there are a great number of viruses in animals which are constantly undergoing mutations. “It is figuring us out faster than we are figuring it out. It doesn’t have anything else to do.” These prophetic words from the film *Contagion* (2011) is very much true in its case (Cook 2014). So far, we have not developed a reliable method to overcome the threat from many varieties of viruses. Since we have a written and well-recorded history of only a few thousand years, we do not have much idea about the extreme struggles our ancestors have had gone through over millions of years. Natural calamities have happened in the past and it will happen in the future too. We should be ready and willing to face them irrespective of whether we are believers or not.

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Hope in God

Darwinian theory of evolution argues that Nature selects and promotes the fittest. However, fitness is often misrepresented as mere muscle power. Evolutionary biology reveals that the species which survived a crisis was not the strongest among the rest but the one which was ready to constantly adapt and endure. Neanderthals were more powerful and numerous than us, *Homo sapiens*. But it was us who survived and not them. Despite of physical disadvantages, we were better at survival than them because of our extraordinary ability at socializing. It helps us to realize that extreme suffering does not imply that life is meaningless because there are people who care for us. Anyone with a humanistic sensibility cares about you in the sense of realizing that we all have a responsibility “to use the laws of universe to enhance the conditions in which all of us can flourish” (Pinker 2019). Standing together at the time of calamities gives great strength. Today we see most of the human population respecting government mandates; and medical staff and public workers toil day and night to care for the sick and to stop the outbreak. As the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche said: “What doesn't kill you makes you stronger”. In the coming years, climate change will release more of these demons from the underground. The present crisis is an excellent opportunity to prepare for the future. For the first time in the history of life on planet earth, a species has attained the capability to nourish or destroy the chain of life. We have a choice. It is all up to us. As St Ignatius of Loyola said, “Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God.”

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The naturalistic and rationalistic approach alone will not help us to endure extreme sufferings and losses. We will soon succumb to despair or angst – life lacks meaning – in the language of Soren Kierkegaard. This is where we cannot proceed without God. Faith, Hope and Love are called Divine Virtues. For a long time in my early youth, I struggled to understand the relevance of Hope. “Faith and Love are enough, why do we need Hope?” I thought. Life has taught me how important hope is. For a person who believes only in the materialistic reality, life is not worth in the midst of extreme and unstoppable suffering. Hope helps a person to see the light beyond the darkness. Even if there is no mathematical probability for the end of struggles, Hope will help one to endure. The Israelites were one among the many tribes of the ancient’s times, insignificant and weak in front of the domineering Egyptians, the Persians and many others. The powerful Pharaonic and Babylonian races had gone down in history but, Israel still endures and makes a significant impact on the world. Hope helps us to sing like the prophet Habakkuk : “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to tread on the heights” (Hab 3:17).

“Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God.” St. Ignatius of Loyola

Never Surrender

This crisis is also a time to be grateful. Scientists of 40 international research institutes are working round the clock to develop a vaccine for this disease. The often forgotten scientific community gave us vaccinations for small pox, polio and many dreadful diseases. It is

estimated that over the years more than 5 billion lives are saved due to the effort of around 100 scientists (and their teams). It is time to remember all of them with a grateful heart. God is not some one who is very remote from us. He labours for us and with us through the scientists, police personals and politicians as said by St. Ignatius in his “Contemplation to attain Love.”

We shall fight this crisis with the will of Winston Churchill: “We shall defend human life, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight in the research labs, we shall fight in the hospitals, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight by isolating ourselves; we shall never surrender.”

We shall never surrender to natural calamities. We must fight and endure with Faith, Hope and Love.

God is with us. Love, Ultimate, Unconditional Love, will triumph!

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Why God Does Not Answer Our Prayers?

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The rapid outbreak of coronavirus - novel COVID-19 pandemic across the globe caught the world unprepared, ill-equipped and untrained. Our world, with its leading scientists hasn't yet found any medicine for cure or vaccine. COVID-19 has, therefore, made thousands and thousands across the world to breathe their last. It has left millions of people either on ventilators or in isolation or home-quarantine. COVID-19 attacked and attacks the people who are either weak with their immune system or weak with their hearts or weak with their sugar and sodium levels. It appears that COVID-19 attacks the weaker side of the people, as human beings generally do. Even satanic or evil spirit loads its gun on the shoulder of the people who are weak, imprudent and impolite and then encourage them to attack one another or attack the Creator of their life, love, faith and hope or attack their own or other organizations illogically. People, who are strong with their spiritual, emotional and physical immune system, can easily resist or can combat with COVID-19 and bounce back to life as testimonies of experiences of love, faith and hope.

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Where is Our God?

Having trapped the world unprepared and ill-equipped, COVID-19 has started behaving as an almost unstoppable phenomenon. It created ripples of terror, fear, anxieties, uncertainties among people. One thing, COVID-19 remained absolutely impartial, unbiased and unprejudiced. No nation, no race, no religion, no political party, no one whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate could influence COVID-19 and could stop it infecting the others. It created fear of death among the people. The complete lockdown restricted the movements of the people to their homes and houses. Lockdown perhaps led people to introspect their independence, making them more insecure about life; that is, death can come at any time.

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The rise in the number of deaths in the world confirmed the insecurity of life due to COVID-19. Panic among the people grew. People, according to their personalities, nationalities, religions, experiences, portfolios, etc., started reacting and explaining the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses from politicians, business people, government, philanthropists, religious leaders, faithful, doctors, health workers, employers, employees, administrations, poor, migrants etc. were so varied from one another and were yet mixed. Their reactions were revolving around the fear of death, insecurity, helplessness and hopelessness. People encountering helplessness but having faith in God perhaps began asking questions: Where is God? Is

Even satanic or evil spirit loads its gun on the shoulder of the people who are weak, imprudent and impolite and then encourage them to attack one another or attack the Creator of their life, love, faith and hope.

COVID-19 pandemic greater than God? Why is He not answering our prayers? Has He stopped loving and caring for His people?

Walking Before the Lord with Faith, Hope and Love

Questions about God, He alone can answer them and in His own time. He has the absolute right and freedom to answer our prayers. Finite beings like us will not be able to fathom the mind and the heart of God. At the same time, there is hope. Scripture bears enough evidence for our hope. The biblical personalities confidently profess that God answers our prayers. They too like us underwent the pangs of uncertainty, fears of death, insecurity, helplessness and often hopelessness. These feelings were accompanied by the noncooperation and noncollaboration of the disappointed, discouraged and frustrated people of God. Yet, God was faithful. God was there as a pillar of cloud during the day and pillar of fire during the night. Thus, the prophets and the leaders encouraged the people of God not to succumb to discouragement and despair but always walk before the Lord with faith, hope and love.

In these trying days of COVID-19 pandemic, similar scenes are played out. We observe people filled with fear, anxiety, insecurity, helplessness and despair on one side, and the others, who often boldly do not cooperate and collaborate with the invoked and necessary safety dynamics. Lack of planning is seen on the part of the authorities not being sensitive to the plight of the poor, migrants, and disorganized labour force. They had nowhere to go for help to meet their essential needs. Essential commodities too, were not made available at the right time. Cooperation and collaboration are effective means to help one another combat the spread and effects of

Perhaps Jesus, as he was in the garden of Gethsemane, asked the same question to his Father. Why should I undergo this suffering? If it is Thy will, please take away this cup. But it is not my will, but Thy will be done.

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covid-19 and therefore, government agencies, church authorities even Pope Francis is encouraging people to participate in the march towards ending the pandemic. In our cooperation and collaboration with all the humans, we might be able to stand as a live witness to the faith, hope and love God has planted in us through Jesus.

Not My Will, but Thy Will

There might be other questions as to why such pandemic and why God cannot stop it? Is there a plan of God behind this pandemic? These questions also need to be addressed. Perhaps Jesus, as he was in the garden of Gethsemane, asked the same question to his Father. Why should I undergo this suffering? If it is Thy will, please take away this cup. But it is not my will, but Thy will be done. He surrendered his total self in the hands of the Father and resolutely walked through his passion and death. He showed in his life, passion and death that love has the power to conquer all evil, including death. Perhaps, here is an invitation for us to ponder on such a powerful message and allow our lives to be rooted and grounded in love and show such love in action. If we do so, then we will be participating in the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord. May the mysteries of the life of Christ: passion, death and resurrection strengthen our hope in God and one another! As the fruit of our prayers, our hope in God and one another can build better humanity according to the will of God, that is, love your God with your soul, mind and heart; love your neighbour as you love yourself, and love your enemies. May these COVID-19 pandemic experiences, both positive and negative, reinforce our hope - hope that builds harmonious humanity!



Praying for Others: How Does It Affect Us?

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Every call and message that I receive these days end with a request, “please pray for me/us.” The pandemic situation of corona is everywhere, and people live in terrible fear and anxiety. What is my role in this epidemic situation when I keep myself ‘secured’ from the unhealthy surroundings? My act could be justified as a lawful citizen to abide the directives of the civil authority. However, when thousands of people live in fright and fretfulness, is it really justifiable? Given my situation, what else can I do? It is here the request to pray for others reverberates in my ears. Can I take ‘praying for others’ as a mission? What is the meaning of intercession? Is prayer of intercession theologically sound? Is prayer of intercession intelligible? This short reflection tries to answer these questions by taking Jesus’ prayer in Lk 10:21 as a foundation.

Situating the Context

In Lk 10:21 we have the instance of Jesus praying to the Father: “At that very moment he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will”. Here we see a contrast between the learned, the wise, and the childlike. While the learned and the wise pretend to understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God, to the childlike it has been revealed

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as they ready to accept the things of the Kingdom of God with the easiness of a child.

Paul articulates this idea very strongly in 1 Cor 1:21: “Since ... the world did not know God through wisdom, it was the will of God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who have faith”.... “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” Similar texts are to be found also in the Hebrew Bible as well, for instance Isa 29:14: “The wisdom of its men shall perish and the understanding of its prudent men be hid,” or Isa 19:11-12: “Utter fools are the prince of Zoan! The wisest of Pharaoh’s advisers give stupid counsel. Where are your wise men? Let them tell you and make known. What the Lord of Hosts has planned.”

So, in all these texts we can see that the wise and the learned are either kept dubious about the power of prayer or questioned the futility of their wisdom, while the childlike is praised for their trust and reliance in the Lord.

The Wise, the Learned and the Prayer of Intercession

The prayer of intercession is among the things which the wise and the learned are inclined to consider as meaningless and even absurd. Certainly the learned and the wise will not object to the primary meaning of the Latin term “*intercedere*”, ‘to walk in the middle,’ ‘ready to help each one of the two parties’ or ‘to interpose oneself in favor of one of them.’ There are many examples of this in the Bible,

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The children can show us how to pray especially when we pray for others, i.e. with innocence, trust, simplicity and ingenuousness. We are called to intercede to the Lord for others like a child.

for instance Joseph asking the chief cupbearer of the king of Egypt to remember him when he will be out of the prison and to speak on his favor to the Pharaoh (Gen 40:14). That is to say, a man or woman can speak on behalf of a fellow man or woman to a third person because this third person can change his mind and a wise intercession may help him to make the right decision or to reverse the wrong decision.

Can this meaning of “*intercedere*” be applied to the prayer of intercession? We believe that God does not make wrong decisions, and therefore, when we come to the prayer of intercession, we ‘stay before God for another person,’ asking him to intervene and modify his/her situation on behalf of that person. Naturally, this would raise objections in the mind of the learned and the wise. They tend to ask: Is not the mind of God right and unchangeable from the beginning? Then, how can God be moved to change his mind and to reverse a wrong decision? We too do sometimes belong to this category, when we think that the prayer of intercession remains somewhere in the air and does not produce fruit, or when we consider it as a second class devotion to which may be given sometimes some scraps of time. In fact God generally gives a help with the free collaboration of the interested person. Here comes the role of the intercessor who is ‘childlike.’

The ‘Childlike’ and the Prayer of Intercession

Against the learned and the wise stands the childlike who receives the gift of intercession ‘to stand before God for another’ (Lk 10:21).

We are “responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual. For know, dear ones, that everyone of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man.” –
Fyodor Dostoevsky

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We can see many examples for this in the Bible: Abraham prayed in order to avert the punishment of Sodom (Gen 18:22-32); Moses interceded for the entire people of Israel (Exod 32:11-13), and also for an individual, like his sister Miriam (Num 12:13); Samuel, who even after breaking with the people, promised to keep interceding for them (1 Sam 12:23) to David, who asked for the life of his son (2 Sam 12:16-17); Amos prayed to the Lord to forgive Jacob, because “he is so small” (Amos 7:1-6); Jeremiah exhorted the people in exile to pray for the welfare of the city to which they were brought (Jer 29:7) etc. We are invited to enter in to the heart of these great intercessors so that we may understand the value of intercession.

The dictionary gives the meaning of ‘childlike’ as an adult having the qualities, such as innocence, trust, and ingenuousness associated with a child, or resembling qualities appropriate to a child or childhood. The gospels tell us how Jesus calls, commissions, and heal children. One of the most powerful Gospel stories is where Jesus insists that children in the crowd be brought to him for blessing (cf. Mk 10:13-16.). Jesus was completely furious with his disciples for keeping the children away from him. His deliberate act of blessing children, the lowliest of the low, is a powerful sign and a political act about how his kingdom works. But Jesus goes further than this by suggesting that ‘whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it’ (Lk 18:17).

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In short, Jesus says that we must learn from children; they tell us important things about our own spiritual health. They can show us how to pray especially when we pray for others, i.e. with innocence, trust, simplicity and ingenuousness. We are called to intercede to the Lord for others like a child.

Meaning of the Prayer of Intercession

Both the Old Testament and New Testament tell us very clearly that God wants us to care for our neighbor. God wants us to

have not only what we call solidarity with others, but also he wants a real concern for each other, a care which represents the care of God for each one of us. He is ready to ask anyone of us with the primordial question which was first posed to Cain: "Where is your brother? Where is your sister? This is clearly expressed in the parable of the last judgment, in the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46, where the Lord says to those who have helped the neighbor "You did to me" (25:40). He is then present in all the loving deeds, in all the acts of forgiveness, in the commitment of those who fight against violence, hatred, famine, suffering and so on.

Those who have the gift of intercession see God's light in the face of every human being. In other words we could say that they see the world as a great net of relationship, or, in the computer's language, a web where everyone is dependent to the other. This is strongly expressed in the words of Staretz Zossima, one of the key figures in the masterpiece of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Love God's people. Because we have come here and shut ourselves within these walls" in order to realize that we are "not only worse than others", but that we are "responsible to all men for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual. For know, dear ones, that everyone of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men and everything on earth, not merely through the general sinfulness of creation, but each one personally for all mankind and every individual man. This knowledge is the crown of life for the monk and every man. Only through that knowledge, our heart grows with infinite, universal, inexhaustible love. Then everyone of you will have the power to win over the whole world by love and to wash away the sins of the world with your tears". And he concludes: "Be proud neither to the little nor to the great. Hate not those who reject you, who insult you, who abuse and slander you. Hate not the atheist, the teachers of evil, the materialists - and I mean not only the good ones - for there are many good ones among them, especially in our day- hate not even the wicked ones. Remember them in your prayer thus: Save, O Lord, all those who have none to

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pray for them, save all those who will not pray. And add: it is not in pride that I make this prayer, O Lord, for I am lower than all men ..."

Certainly this interdependence and necessary interconnection, by which every one of us is bound to all others, is a deep spiritual mystery. Prayer of intercession helps us to recognize little by little this mutual belonging, which has to characterize all our actions according to the commandment "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18). Moreover, prayers of intercession help to us understand how much everything was woven and kept together by the Lord for a greater web of relationship.

From the above discussion, it is quite certain that the prayer of intercession is not to obtain a change in God's will, but to let the creature have part in the gifts of God. God graciously allows us to desire what he wants us to give, and we express it through the intercessory prayers. However, as we have seen above, there is much more than this. God wants us to be for one another, showing interest, compassion, charity, mutual help, and love in everything. Prayer of intercession exercises this mutual responsibility towards one another. God wants us to create a great unity in mankind, and this unity is actualized by the prayer of intercession. Thus, through the prayers of intercession a full communion is realized among human beings. Those who can do something for the other in the physical sense are called to do it, and all others are invited to unite their prayer in a great intercession. And we have a model in Jesus Christ, who "lives forever to make intercession" for us (Hebr 7:25; Rom 8:34).

Of course, the intercession presupposes that the person who does it is accepted by the Lord, is in a sense his friend, as it is said of Abraham, to whom God does not want to hide anything of what he is about to do (Gen 18:17). The intercessor is somebody who chooses to live according to God's project. He

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is a person who really cares for his brothers and sisters and wishes that they live according to God's will. Therefore the presence of many intercessors is also a way for the realization of a community which corresponds to God's plan.

Conclusion

The prayer of intercession appears as nonsense to the people who look only to this world, and it is also not understood by those who measure everything by the yard stick of physical effectiveness and of visible fruit. The prayer of intercession is a gift of the Spirit of God who works for the unity of God's plan for humanity. The prayer of intercession is a consequence of the law of mutual belonging and of mutual responsibility. It looks to the unity of mankind by giving to each one the invitation to participate to the difficulties and trials of every human being. The prayer of intercession is an expression of the structure of being, in which the primacy is not that of the person who cares for his own identity and well-being, but that of the person-in relation, who cares for the being of other.

So, in this time of corona pandemic, one way of keeping the suffering humanity close to our heart, to express our solidarity with the victims of corona virus pandemic is to raise our hearts and voices to the Lord who is the sovereign of the heaven and the earth. In short, the challenge before us at this crucial time is to be an intercessor for the world, especially for those who are affected and afflicted by this pandemic situation.

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Under the Shadow of God's Wings

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We are living in a world of grave crisis because of the Coronavirus. As disciples of Jesus, how do we respond to this situation? In the Old Testament, many of the Psalms speak of the trust of the people who are caught up in difficult situations. Psalm 91 is one of these special Psalms in which the people have repeatedly turned to God in times of sickness, loneliness, and trouble. It has been committed to heart by thousands of people, and millions have turned to it with thankfulness in the midst of life's calamities. In the words of Athanasius to Marcellinus, "If you desire to establish yourself and others in devotion, to know what confidence is to be reposed in God, and what makes the mind fearless, you will praise God by reciting the ninetieth (ninety-first) Psalm". At this time of global pandemic with the novel coronavirus COVID-19, this Psalm speaks of God's power, presence, intentions, and protection against fear. Psalm 91 is ordinarily classified as a Psalm of Confidence or Trust.

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The Message of the Psalm

Psalm 91 is a classic on the sure providence of God as the citadel of faith. The first verse of Psalm 91 is a thematic statement, expressing what the remainder of the Psalm will be about: "You who dwells in the shelter of the Most High/ Who abide in the shadow of the Almighty" (v.1)

When the Psalmist makes this statement he immediately breaks in to confess his own faith before commending it to us: “I will say of the LORD, ‘He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress, *my* God, in whom I trust’ ” (v. 2). This poses a question to each one of us: Is the God of the Bible my refuge and my fortress in times of trouble? The Psalmist identifies God as his shelter, shadow, refuge, and fortress on whom one can trust.

In God’s covenants with Israel, God promises abundance as the nation is faithful. When they committed themselves to God, He gave success in their purpose of inhabiting the Promised Land. As they trusted, no pestilence would keep the Israelite army from defeating its enemies and from becoming the nation God promised. The language and imagery of Psalm 91 are open-ended enough to be relevant and powerful in many situations. Indeed, Psalm 91 has served throughout the centuries and continues to serve as a source of encouragement and strength for the people of God. The Psalm seems to be the work of a teacher who seeks to nurture the trust of

“I will say of the Lord,
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whom I trust’ ” (Ps
91: 2)

the faithful by encouraging each of them to take the LORD as their refuge from all the troubles of life.

Psalm 91 assures Israel of the safety from peril for those who make the temple of God their

habitual resort (91:1-2). Then, in a direct address, the Psalmist exhorts them not to fear the pestilence which is destroying multitudes on every side (v. 5-7). He also emphasizes that God will keep them safely in the hands of guardian angels (v. 9. 11-13). Finally, he speaks in the name of God, assuring the promise of God’s deliverance, protection and His everlasting presence for those who love and know Him (v. 14-16). The life of the faithful in Israel was set in an environment of threatening dangers. In this Psalm, the word “pestilence” is described in several terms: ‘the terror of the night’ (v.5a); the ‘arrow that flies by day’(v.5b); the ‘destruction

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that wastes at noonday’(v.6). Thus, one has to face multiple currents and structural threats to one’s life like crisis situation of “danger from enemies/persecution” and “sickness/death”. When the Psalmist speaks of ‘pestilence’ he may have in mind an evil spell. This vocabulary and its frequency in the Psalms bring out the important role of trust in coping with the anxieties that beset their life. The Psalmist is not unaware of dangers, but any fear of adversaries is far outweighed by his confidence in the security that derives from God.

God Protects Us

The following verses describe the protection of God from many dangers (vv. 3-13). Yet in all of these situations, one has a shelter with God — his faithfulness will be their shield and rampart (v. 4b). The wing of the cherubim covered the space over the cover of the Ark which God had chosen to make his throne. A person may trust in God, commit himself and his way to God, and know he is forever secure in God’s hand. The word “Refuge” used as a metaphor for God’s care and protection

is a pervasive theme in the Psalter. In its liturgical context, it means to look to the LORD for security from threatening dangers. Basically, the theme of the Psalm can be summed up in one word: “security.” That security is found through faith in God. All such threatening forces are robbed of their destructive power because the worshipper is encircled within God’s protecting power. The theme of the Psalm, as noted, is God’s

Described as a protection for His people, God’s comfort is a wing of security amidst this world’s uncertainties and suffering. Trusting in God grants no exemption from the life-threatening and destructive forces which are part of human experience, but it deprives them of their sting and enables them to face without fear.

protective care of one who is committed to him. The essence of the security of which the Psalm speaks lies in a continuing relationship with God. God will save the trusting soul from two kinds of dangers: first, the subtle snare of enemies, described as the trap a fowler used to catch birds, and second, death by disease or pestilence. He will save us from the corona pandemic in ways unknown to us. But surely, he will protect us.

Conclusion

God is our refuge, comfort, and shade amidst pandemic. Described as a protection for His people, God's comfort is a wing of security amidst this world's uncertainties and suffering. Trusting in God grants no exemption from the life-threatening and destructive forces which are part of human experience, but it deprives them of their sting and enables them to face without fear. Our focus should not be on fear and uncertainty but in God alone, even in circumstances of diseases and troubles. In short, this Psalm urges us to be the beacons of hope and to trust and cling to God in all the circumstances of our life.

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Mystery of Suffering Unravels the Mystery of God's Faithfulness

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God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life (Jn.3:16). Yes, out of His love He reconciled the fallen humankind through His Son Emmanuel 'God with us.' Jesus is always with us as mystic Meister Eckhart says: "Man goes far away or near but God never goes off. He is always standing close at hand and even if he cannot stay within, he goes no further than the door."

Suffering as Inevitable

Right from the beginning, suffering has become the subject of heated discussion, argumentation and meditation. Almost all religions try to explain the cause of suffering and offer ways and means to respond to it. At present, we are suffering physically, mentally and psychologically, especially due to the outbreak of the pandemic Coronavirus. It has infected millions of people all over the world. Many lost their loved ones unexpectedly. In order to stop the spread of the Covid-19 many countries have been put under strict lockdown which has destroyed the economic growth and separated many from their dear ones. It has created fear, anxiety and restlessness in humanity. In such times of trial and suffering, sometimes we are tempted to lose our faith and hope in life. We often grapple with basic questions like: Does God really exist? Does he really love

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the world? We forget everything, His merciful love and our life as a gift from God and sometimes even think of end one's life. Suffering cannot be explained fully with human intellect. However, there remains the possibility of accepting it as an inevitable part of human life and then to transform and integrate it into human life.

According to philosopher Viktor Frankl, one can find meaning to suffering. He says that suffering ceases to be suffering in some way to the moment it finds a meaning. Such as the meaning of a sacrifice. One of the greatest gifts faith in God offers us is a sense of meaning that transcends the ups and downs of life, and that meaning gives birth to hope.

Frankl claims that there are three main avenues on which one arrives at meaning in life. The first is by creating a work or doing a deed. Secondly, by experiencing something or encountering someone: in other words, meaning can be found not only in works but also in love. Thirdly, even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate one cannot change, may rise above oneself, may grow beyond oneself and by so doing change oneself (Frankl 2000). If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an inevitable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death, human life cannot be complete. We can look at sufferings in many ways. Some suffering makes it possible for us to feel compassion for others who are victimized and suffer innocently. Suffering can also be for our purification. As the Scripture says "See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity" (Is 48:10).

God replied
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Suffering as Lived Mystery

Some suffering enables us to follow Christ crucified closely because he himself promised, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their daily cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Some pains, like the loss of our beloved ones, make us realize that none of us are indispensable in this world. Such experiences also teach us how little sovereignty we have over our lives. In this way, pain contributes to human solidarity.

Ultimately suffering is a mystery and God is the fellow sufferer. Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (2018) in his book *The Risk of Hope* tells one of his experiences. He met a man whose sister was raped some years ago. The man was very angry with God and said, I do not understand why God allowed this to happen. Why was God not able to rescue my sister? Why did he not help my sister? In prayer God replied him. How could I have helped your sister? I was also suffering with her; she was not the only victim. I was a victim like her torn and unjustly treated. We can also recall the famous poem "Footprints in the Sand," where the person questioned God when she/he saw in times of difficulty that only one set of footprints on the sand, God replied "during your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." It invites us to face difficulties with courage without losing hope.

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However, Christianity becomes meaningful, enlightening and consoling when it comes to the question of suffering because a Christian God manifested in Jesus Christ has understood very well the mystery of human suffering. As a result, He is not a God who looks at suffering from far but becomes co-



sufferer. He knows what is pain, hunger, thirst, loneliness rejection and finally, death. He is not just a pure act, unmoved mover, or an infinite being. These are philosophical concepts, but He is much more than that. Therefore, it is easy for us to establish a relationship with him, to pray to him, to go to him when we suffer. We will find more solace and comfort in a God who suffers with us and for us. By saying this, I do not mean that we should glorify suffering. Some of the physical and mental sufferings are so destructive that one cannot justify them. We need to remain silent in the face of such pain, because suffering is not the end. For Christ Crucifixion is not the end of the story, but it leads to Resurrection.

Conclusion

Our lady of Lourdes said to St. Bernadette, “I cannot promise happiness in this life but in the next life.” We find in the gospel the miserable life of Lazarus who suffered a lot, but when he died, he was placed at the side of Abraham (Lk 16:23). Therefore, each of our pains and sufferings has something to offer us, so let us join with the suffering of Christ and endure it.

In our journey we are not alone but Immanuel God is with us. Let us be sure of His faithfulness, for if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).

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Thy Will Be Done: Prayer, Compassion and Tenderness

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These days corona pandemic, which we are experiencing so intensely, are to be in the annals of history. No time in the past had had brought the whole world to a standstill. Catastrophe has struck the world in the form of COVID- 19. Overconfidence, carelessness and sheer individualism has fuelled the death toll to unimaginable figures, in twenty first millennium. Quarantine has brought us to an unimagined situation where we are left with ourselves, isolated from the rush of the world. True to political observations of the political scientist, Benedict Anderson, nations have become mere “imagined communities” and the one last meeting point is humanity. Even the most powerful states have been brought to its knees. In the midst of this crisis, we also see the martyrs of today’s world; doctors, nurses, health workers, police etc. forsaking their lives for a better humanity.

Sparks of Creativity

Human being as a living being encompassing spiritual, social, economic, cultural and social aspects has been evolving so fast that today in the dawn of twenty first we humans claimed to have reached its zenith. From talking about Super humans, Cyborg, Missions to Mars, a small virus has made a paradigm shift in the course of history. The Quarantine days has once again reminded us of the fragility of human race and of the illusionary causes behind which we were rushing. The Biblical

Quarantine day where Jesus isolated himself to win over the craving for material goods, power and recognition helped foster, illustrate and spread the vibe of the Kingdom of God. Crammed into households cautiously we are but to live this out gracefully. As law abiding citizen of a modern nation state, we are to adjust to these constraints with complete cooperation. We are sure to experience loneliness, but, instead of giving up remember that God has endowed us with the power to turn it into solitude. It is here, where creativity sparks and thus something meaningful takes birth.

Ushering a New Order

The end of the pandemic is sure to usher a new order; with the collapse of the first world countries, priorities would be reorganized, and thus every aspect of life would hopefully be renewed. The signs of times along with the Gospel Values strongly recommends a complete 'Metanoia' with strong roots and convictions that would usher radical steps and to warn against any compromise as death toll for ourselves.

It is a natural that at troubled times like these God comes under fire. Before we do so there is a lot that we have done. reckless exploitation, dumping of waste and harmful materials, all kinds of pollution, depletion of resources and extinction of animals were at an all-time high. Even amidst these crises the humanity was pretending as if nothing had ever happened. God who knows everything is sure to have a better plan of prosperity and hope for humanity. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." That plan is related to the Kingdom of God that has already dawned among us ("already, not yet").

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Thine Be Done

As committed Christians, our response is same as of the Son of Man when he says "Not my will, but thine be done." It's high time that we stop our reckless exploitation and humble ourselves. Pope Francis in his exhortation recently said "In these days of trial, as humanity trembles at the threat of coronavirus pandemic, I propose that all Christians join their voices together to heaven; to respond to the pandemic of virus with the universality of prayer, compassion and tenderness."

"I propose that all Christians join their voices together to heaven; to respond to the pandemic of virus with the universality of prayer, compassion and tenderness." Pope Francis

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Faith as Fostering Immune System: A Psycho-Spiritual Perspective

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Covid-19 has brought us face to face with the ultimate reality of life, that is survival. This robust virus, like spirituality, does not adhere to the boundaries of race, caste, ethnicity, religion, language, age, education and expertise. It enters all with the speed of breath and enslaves the respiratory system of any human. It crawls slowly and steadily. It advances like cancer and makes the person vulnerable to any type of emergency and failure. So, the ultimate goal of the virus is to defeat survival and life. Therefore, it is advised by all the statutory bodies to avoid all contacts with the people infected with virus and follow strictly the social distancing. Right now, it may be a very painful process for many to be locked inside the house. It can drive people crazy and make them totally helpless. Peeks of despair can be seen and felt not only among those who do not have day to day resources for survival, but also, among those who have enough but do not know how to manage their time without keeping up to the previously conditioned daily routine.

Covid-19 and Immune System

There are two major avenues of difficulty that arise with this pandemic. One created by the Covid-19 and another by the parallel process of being locked inside the house with social distancing. Both create stress and perhaps, for many it is a time of chronic stress. Chronic stress has two major consequences. It suppresses the immune system,¹ and at the same time, creates emotional upheavals

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and a negative mood.² Psychologists differentiate between two types of stresses, viz., the acute or chronic. The former helps in developing “adaptive processes for potential adverse environments,”³ and the latter damages the ability to adapt, thus, opening the system to various malfunctions and diseases. In the living beings, chronic stress elicits more circulation of cortisol, adrenaline and nonadrenaline.⁴ These hormones trigger off the fight or flight reaction. As a consequence, breath and heart rate, glucose level in the blood, and the circulation of the blood in the skeletal muscles increases to more than tolerable levels.⁵ Such a status renders the immune system weak and makes the whole person more vulnerable to the outside viral attacks. After scrutinizing various studies, Cohen attempts to make a connection between stress and upper respiratory infections.⁶ Of course, he is not referring to covid-19, yet, the assumption that immune system can be weakened because of the chronic stress, stands true.

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Drawing from the Infinite Resource of Faith

Present lock-down scenario has created enough stress to create an imbalance among the families, social and economic situations. Being at home without any productive work and too

much of time on hand can create a lot of stress. For some it could create acute stress and for others chronic. Not able to move out of the house to gain essential commodities, exercise, social meetings and employment has the possibilities of creating more chronic stress. Such condition itself is enough to trigger negative emotions and pessimism leading to helplessness and despair.



In these trying times everyone may look for a quick-heal process, yet, looking at the world pandemic, one can easily judge that the end of such attack is not in the close vicinity as envisaged. Such a perception also can create a lot of stress. Watching TV and the news makes us wonder whether we shall overcome such a crisis with our own potential and medical help. Here is where, Koevig intervenes and suggests that we have a common infinite resource and that is our faith, or spirituality or religion. He suggests that religion provides “a more positive, optimistic worldview,” and thus, improves coping mechanisms with acute or chronic stress,” and thereby ameliorates “the effects that stress has on the immune system.”⁷ He also patronizes a belief that “what people believe, think, and feel may have a direct impact on neuroendocrine and immune function-systems that play a vital role in warding off disease and speeding recovery from illness.”⁸ These are powerful beliefs and tested by scientific research. Further, Solomon believes that faith can activate the brain-psych-body balance, particularly during the times of chronic stress and strengthen the adaptive coping styles coupled with developing positive emotions.⁹ Therefore, we have hope in the common resource that we enjoy every day, our religion and spirituality. It can help us build a healthy relationship with self, God, others and the cosmos and fortify the immune system.¹⁰ Religion provides us with the ways of grasping coherently

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with meaning of life. It helps us to engage in rituals and symbolic expressions. It helps us to gain means and methods to awaken the divine and let the divine reign in us even in the most difficult situations of life.

Ways of Dealing with Stress

Let us look at some of the concrete ways of dealing with stress especially in the present situation of Covid-19.

Chronic stress begins with perception. Clarity in perception as regards Covid-19 can help us do away with unnecessary stress. Most of the news items are telling us that covid-19 is a deadly virus. We need to accept that it is so. It is transmitted through the droplets. So care has to be taken that we wash our hands regularly, keep a safe distance from others, and try not to touch the facial region too often as and when we are outside the safe precincts. In many cases, people have been able to come back to normality after being affected. So there is hope for those who can retain and accelerate the inner strength of their immune system.

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Secondly, as psychoneuroimmunologists (PNIs) are suggesting, we can begin to develop a positive relationship with God. Understand God’s inner nature which is eternal and infinite love. Surrender ourselves to God, and allow that eternal and infinite nature to come down into us and dwell among us. Prayerful practices such as reading the Scriptures, rosary, Jesus prayer, and meditative reflection can help in developing a personal relationship with God and allow God to be the centre of our lives.

Healthy conversations and sharings involving one’s inner thoughts, feelings, emotions, and future plans could be promoted. It might be very beneficial to help one another recognize each others’ contribution towards growth in all.

Thirdly, PNIs are also suggesting that we need to rebuild our family and social relations. In the normal times family and social relations take a backseat. Employment and job responsibilities take the front seat. Covid-19 has reversed the situation for a while. We can use such an opportunity to rebuild our family relations. Healthy conversations and sharings involving one's inner thoughts, feelings, emotions, and future plans could be promoted. It might be very beneficial to help one another recognize each others' contribution towards growth in all. They could respect each other's uniqueness and appreciate the differences. One of the important elements that might help in rebuilding relationships is the practice of non-judgementality. Begin with one's own thoughts and feelings. View and observe them non-judgementally. With practice we will be able to refrain from acting on those automatic thoughts and emotions. When we stop acting on them then we don't react. It is called the art of self-regulation.



Fourthly, being at home after a long gap and for a long period time has the possibility of triggering off old memories and old experiences which we nurture in our hearts. Some could be positive and some negative. Often negative ones will exert more power in accelerating and retaining the chronic stress and thus, make the system vulnerable. Present situation might be a God-given opportunity to process the old negative experiences through the lens of God and forgive people, especially those who have demeaned, insulted, rejected and hurt us most. Such reconciliation can strengthen the immune system.

Fifthly, we need to take care of our bodies. They need nourishment and exercise. PNI's are suggesting that moderate intensity physical exercise can increase relaxation and strengthen the immune

system.¹¹ Research in this area suggest that certain amount of regularity and consistency helps in stimulating anti-inflammatory and the immune system of the body.¹²

Finally, we are all human beings in this big global village. Helping one another and encouraging one another might go a long way in rebuilding ourselves. Therefore, moving out of ourselves in kindness, generosity, mercy and compassion towards those who are suffering more than us due to joblessness, lack of essential commodities, injustice and poverty has the power to strengthen our communal ties over against the common enemy, covid-19. We could generously and wholeheartedly enter into such ventures that will help others to gain a chance to survive this pandemic.

Conclusion

There could be other methods and more effective than which suggested in the article. When we share them with others reflectively and respectfully, we all gain the benefits of such methods and together all can fight the Covid-19 with internal and external strengths. Our common faith could be the great resource for our wholeness and healing.

¹ Eduardo Vignoto Fernandes, Celio Estanislau and Emerson José Venancio, "Moderate Intensity Physical Exercise: Psychoneuroimmunological Aspects," *Rev Bras Med Esporte* vol.24 no.5 São Paulo (Sept./Oct. 2018): 395, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1517-869220182405185533>.

² Antonia C. Lyons and Kerry Chamberlain, *Health Psychology: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 154-5.

³ Qing Yan, *Psychoneuroimmunology: Systems Biology Approaches to Mind-Body Medicine* (Switzerland: Springer International, 2016), 11.

⁴ Eduardo Vignoto Fernandes, Celio Estanislau and Emerson José Venancio, "Moderate Intensity Physical Exercise: Psychoneuroimmunological Aspects," *Rev Bras Med Esporte* vol.24 no.5 São Paulo (Sept./Oct. 2018): 396.



Our Courageous Faith: Walking Together Heart-in-Heart

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Introduction

This is possibly the first time in many centuries when the whole world is challenged as challengingly as now. At this point in the history of the world, the so-called rich nations and the so-called poor nations are all in the same boat trying to row to the shore. Now the elite and rich even within a nation are on the same level as the poorest of the poor. Those in high-rises are equal to those who live in hovels, slums and on the streets. Those with luxurious accommodations and who earn six and even seven figures salaries per month are on the same level as those who have nowhere to lay their heads and who may not even have a square meal a day.

However, the Caronavirus which causes COVID-19, has taught us many lessons. The most striking of them all has been a stark and grim reminder of the fact that after all is said and done, we are only mortal. This lesson which ought to have been evident and obvious was definitely not. Many of us thought (and some possibly still do) that we were/are invincible. We could do what we wanted, live as we wanted to and nothing and no one could touch us or wake us up from our complacency. The Caronavirus intervened and put a stop to this way of thinking, albeit temporarily (because history has taught us that we do not learn

- ⁵ Eduardo Vignoto et al, "Moderate Intensity Physical Exercise: Psychoneuroimmunological Aspects," *Rev Bras Med Esporte* vol.24 no.5 São Paulo (Sept./Oct. 2018): 396.
- ⁶ Sheldon Cohen, "Psychosocial Stress, Social Networks and Susceptibility to Infection," in *The Link Between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and Faith factor*, eds. Harold G. Koenig and Harvey J. Cohen (New York: Oxford, 2002), 101-16.
- ⁷ Harold G. Koenig, "The Connection Between Psychoneuroimmunology and Religion," in *The Link Between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and Faith factor*, eds. Harold G. Koenig and Harvey J. Cohen (New York: Oxford, 2002), 22.
- ⁸ Harold G. Koenig, "The Connection", 27.
- ⁹ George Solomon, "The Developmental History of Psychoneuroimmunology," in *The Link Between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and Faith factor*, eds. Harold G. Koenig and Harvey J. Cohen (New York: Oxford, 2002), 39.
- ¹⁰ Warren S. Brown, "Psychoneuroimmunology and Western Religious Tradition," in *The Link Between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and Faith factor*, eds. Harold G. Koenig and Harvey J. Cohen (New York: Oxford, 2002), 271.
- ¹¹ Fernandes et al "Moderate," 398.
- ¹² Fernandes et al "Moderate," 396.

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life's lessons as we ought to). The Caronavirus has indeed been a great leveller.

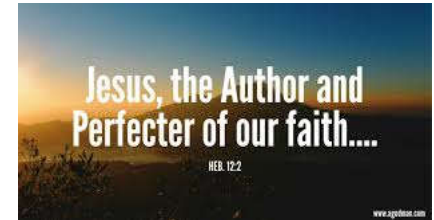
Treatise on Faith in Hebrews Chapter 11

“Now faith is the assurance (reality) of things hoped for, the conviction (proof) of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1)

- a. In an attempt to respond to the present situation in which we find ourselves, we can turn to what the letter to the Hebrews says about faith in Chapter 11 of that same letter. It defines faith in the following words, “Now faith is the assurance (reality) of things hoped for, the conviction (proof) of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1). It goes on to detail the faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah and then elaborates on the faith of Abraham. This faith is explained from three points of view. These are: God’s promise to Abram¹ of (1) land (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-15,17; 15:18;), (2) progeny (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 17:4-8, 15-16,19; 18:10; 21:3; 22:17) and (3) the sacrifice of his son Isaac (22:1-10).
- b. In the first case, Abram did indeed have land and become prosperous according to the promise of the Lord. However, he did not let his prosperity get the better of him. This is seen in his generosity to let his nephew Lot have the first choice of which land he wanted to possess (Gen 13:8-12). This generosity on the part of Abram resulted in God being even more generous with him (Gen 13:14-18). Though there were moments in Abram’s life when he faltered (Gen 15:3; 17:17; 18:12), these were brief. For the most part, he believed and “the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Though he was landless and advanced in age, because he did what God commanded him to do and did it with faith, he was blessed beyond his own expectations with both land and progeny (Gen 17:5; Gen 21:1-7; 24:34-36). However, even as he received blessings in abundance from God, he was

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asked to give up or sacrifice his son (Gen 22:1-2), who would be the one who would continue his blood line.



When Abraham listened to this command of God, he shows no surprise whatever nor does he raise any objection. He obeys because he has faith that whatever God does will be for his good and God’s glory. As a matter of fact, so great is Abraham’s faith in God’s word that he even makes up an answer (Gen 22:8) to his son’s question about the offering (Gen 22:7). The result of his willingness to obey the voice of God and do God’s will in faith results in God responding to him with generosity that only God is capable of (Gen 22:15-18).

- c. The catalogue of faith continues with the faith of the parents of Moses (Heb 11:23) and then of Moses himself (Heb 11:24-28). It begins with God’s providential care of Moses right from his birth (Ex 2:1-10) till the time he could be God’s instrument (Ex 3:7-12) in redeeming the people from slavery and oppression to freedom and blessing (Ex 14:30-31)². However, it was not easy for Moses to undertake to be God’s prophet. From when he approached Pharaoh (who refused to listen to Moses or relent) (Ex 5:1-2, 23; 7:13-16, 22-23; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,12,35; 10:20,27) till even after accompanying the people back to the Promised Land (who kept complaining against both Moses and Aaron) (5: 20-23; 6:9; 17:1-7), Moses has tremendous challenges when he obeyed God’s word and acted as God wanted him to. Yet, he persevered. Though he was not privileged to see the Promised Land (Deut 32:52; 34:4), he did not give up the mission entrusted to him and persevered to the very end (Deut 34:5).

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d. The eulogy continues by mentioning six individuals in the later history of Israel (Heb 11:32) who may have been considered heroes in Israel's history.³ Of



these, four are judges (Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah), one a king (David) and one a prophet (Samuel).⁴ In this summary, we are presented with what was accomplished through their faith. In each of those mentioned, they did obtain the promises that were made to them.⁵

e. However, even as the treatise on faith continues, we are told of those who had to undergo great ordeal and suffer much with no indication of an end in sight. It seems that besides having Eleazar (2 Macc 6:18-31) and the Maccabean brothers in mind (2 Macc 7:1-42) the author would also have had prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Zechariah, Jeremiah and Isaiah in mind. The trials that all of these had to face was because of their fidelity and their firm conviction that they were doing what God had called them to do.

f. The treatise ends with an affirmation of faith in God's word. Though it seemed on the surface level that many of those who did God's will, did not receive their just reward, they in fact did receive something much better than they expected. This is why we are called despite evidence to the contrary to believe even when we cannot see and even when we do not see. We are called to do what we have to do in every present moment and persevere in our faith in imitation of Jesus himself who is the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Heb 12:1-3).

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Our Response

In connection with the treatise in Hebrews, how do we respond with faith in the situation in which we find ourselves?

The Caronavirus has brought the whole world to its knees. No matter how advanced our Science and Technology is, we find that at this moment we are helpless. Even now, it is not clear how the virus originated, how it spreads (all that we have now are a variety of theories), how it can be controlled (isolation from others is considered safer than contact, but whether the infection can be caused from surfaces is another matter) and how we must respond to the situation and life. It is estimated that it may take eighteen months and more to find a cure for this viral infection.

Our response cannot be on merely the individual level, but also has to be at the National/International levels. We now have to think globally and act both globally and locally. This is how I suggest we can do that:

On the Individual Level

a. Positive Thinking and Positive Actions

One response to the fact that the Caronavirus is spreading so rapidly is to throw in the towel, to give up and give in. It is to allow negative thinking, emotions and feelings to rise to the surface of one's consciousness and so to despair. It can also be to see the present situation as the wrath of God⁶ and therefore blame God or accuse God of not caring.⁷

Another response is to think positively, creatively and constructively. These positive thoughts will express themselves in positive feelings and actions. I do believe that these positive responses will not only improve the atmosphere in one's home but will also go beyond one's home to others. The way to do this is to start each day with a positive affirmation of oneself, others and the world. Self-

talk is a great help in this regard. We keep telling ourselves that things will get better and that God is still in control. We continue to focus on the little things no matter how small. We thank God that we have the facilities we have like water, food, a mobile phone which allows us to stay in touch with others and the world, internet facilities and so many things we usually have taken for granted. We can thank God for the peace and quiet that we are experiencing and that the quality of the air we breathe has improved so considerably. We thank God that we are able to breathe without impediment or difficulty. We thank God that we are getting more rest now than we ever did in the recent past. We thank God that there are so many selfless doctors, nurses and medical personnel who are working hard to help others. We thank God for those who are toiling to research a cure for this virus. We thank God for giving us an opportunity to thank him. We can use the extra time we have to always do the things we wanted to but never found the time to do them. If we are blessed with Internet facility, we can learn a new language or skill. We can simply be content with spending time with the members of our family.

b. Live in the Present Moment

One of the most challenging things for us to do is to live in the present moment. We often have regrets about the past or are obsessed with the future. Consequently we do not live in the present moment and it passes us by. This is time like no other to simply be in the NOW. In reality, there is no next moment or tomorrow. The present moment is all we have and will ever have. Today is indeed the tomorrow we worried about yesterday. Now is the later and later is now.

c. Exercise

In order for our minds to be fresh our bodies must also be fresh. This is an excellent time for regular and dedicated exercise. One does not need to have too much space for

exercise.

Depending on one's age and health, one can choose that exercise that suits one best.

d. Reconnect

This is also a time to renew old friendships and strengthen relationships. While it is not possible to have physical contact because of social distancing it does not mean that our hearts have to be far from each other. For those who are blessed with mobile and smartphones, it is fairly easy to get in touch with others who also have the same facility.

e. Meditate/Pray

Prayer and Meditation are a great way to relieve stress and to connect with God. There are a variety of ways to pray. One of these is verbal prayer (reciting the name of God or an attribute of God over and over again, reading a text from scripture and seeing how it applies to my life or reciting a popular prayer by rote, but stopping after each phrase or sentence to see how I can apply it to my present situation). Another way is without words. I simply become aware of the breath that I take in, which I hold in my lung and which I exhale. When I am breathing in, I think only of the positive.

Deeds in this context are: providing to researchers the best facilities and conditions in which to do the required research (in this context generosity is needed from the ones who have), ensuring that the poor, elderly, differently abled and all marginalized groups are looked after and provided for, giving to doctors and medical personnel as much support as possible in terms of acknowledgement of their services, providing the rest they require and looking after their needs.

It is this is hold within my lungs. When I breathe out, I exhale all that is negative and noxious within me. Yet another way is to use the four fingers and thumb of one's hands to pray. I begin with the thumb and pray those who are closest to me (the members of my family, my friends, my relatives, a loved one who is sick or going through some turmoil at this time). I can bring each member and ask for a special grace for them. I then move to the pointer. Here I pray for those who point the way. These could be religious leaders, teachers, mentors, guides and others who have shown me the way to what is good. When I come to the tallest finger, I pray for world leaders (Presidents/Prime Ministers/Chancellors of countries/other leaders) that they be blessed with wisdom to lead their nations individually and co-operate with each other at this challenging time. The ring finger is the weakest finger. Here, I bring those who are not as fortunate as I. These will include the millions in every country who are homeless and live from one meal to the next, those who do not know where their next meal is coming from or where they will sleep at night, those who have no one with whom they can share if they have a toothache or headache, those who are shunned and driven away because they are suspect and those whom nobody cares about or even notices. Finally, when I come to the little finger I pray for myself. I ask for the grace to keep living a life of gratitude and a live in the present.

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f. Reach out to Someone in Need

Often, we get so caught up in our own small selfish worlds that we have no time to even think about the challenges that others go through. If there is an elderly or differently abled person, can I reach out to him/her in some small way?

g. Faith

In the context of the definition and catalogue of faith given by Hebrews 11 and also that things did not always happen

the way they were expected to, we are called to a faith that believes without seeing and even to a faith that believes even when it does not see. If one was able to see before believing, it would not require faith of any kind. However, in the present situation, to have faith is indeed a challenge. There seems to be no respite to the plight of the whole world. A cure seems so far away. How can we believe that this is for the good of each one of us and for the good of the world? Abram was landless, advanced in age and did not have progeny. God told Abram what he had to do, Abram did it (Gen 12:4) and became Abraham (Gen 17:5). Moses was diffident (Ex 4:1; 6:12), he was not eloquent and slow of speech and slow of tongue (Ex 4:10), yet he did as God commanded him and though he did not see the promised land, he did succeed in leading the people out of Egypt (Deut 34:4). Through these examples and others enumerated by the letter to the Hebrews here, we are called to continue to do what we have to do and obey the commands of the Lord. It is likely that like Abram, we may be blessed to see the cure in the immediate future and so experience our own becoming Abraham. It is also likely that like Moses the cure might come after the Lord calls us to himself. Be that as it may, our response is to continue to have faith and to continue to believe. This means to be sure that the reality we hope for will become real and the conviction that even though we cannot see, God will make a way.



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On the National and International Levels

a. Sharing Information in an Open Manner

Though each national government will be concerned about its own people first, the world leaders must also realise that

this is a universal not national or parochial challenge. This is why the approach to this challenge must be universal. We have long since realise



that our world is indeed a global village and now is the time to put that realization in action. We use the advances in science and technology to reach out to each other with information, resources and even funds if needed. It is the need of the hour to get rid of our selfish and narrow-minded way of proceeding and put the needs of the whole of humanity before everything else. Now is not the time for world leaders to try and score brownie points or to get popularity votes. Now is the time for magnanimity and large-heartedness. Now is the time for generosity and thinking and acting globally and universally.

b. Keeping the Populace Informed

The larger majority of the people are not aware of the intricacies of the problem that we are facing. As a matter of fact, even experts in the medical profession are still groping in the dark. In a situation like this it is important for world leaders to inspire confidence in their citizens. This they can do by regularly giving out information through whichever means they can to even those who live in the remotest part of their respective countries. When information is given by someone in authority, it is more easily believed than otherwise. In order to do this the services of medical experts could be used so that correct information and not myths are disseminated as much as is possible.

c. Love over Fear

In order to ensure that instructions about lockdown and other measures are followed, governments use a variety of measures. Some of these are violent and involve the use of physical force. It is a proven fact that while force does work

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temporarily to ensure discipline the effects are temporary and in most instances, obedience is out of fear and not conviction.⁸ If governments take steps to educate the people as best they can (using the expertise of renowned medical personnel and other knowledgeable persons) and appeal to deeper values like care for oneself and the other, generosity, altruism and above all love, it will have a more lasting effect.

d. Turn to God

God is known by different names and worshipped differently in different religions and cultures. In some cultures, God is not acknowledged and worship of God is not allowed or approved. The noun “God” is not a name for God. It may be translated as ‘Supreme Being’, or ‘Divine Being’ or any other name that one prefers. We have to understand with our minds and hearts that God is God and we must let God be God. We also have to know that though we sometimes like to think that we are god and like to play god, we are humans. And if there was any doubt before this pandemic that we as humans are supreme, it is quite certain that all doubt is removed now. We are vulnerable, we are weak, we are fragile and we are dust. If we understand and accept this and if we acknowledge that we do not know, it will be the beginning of wisdom. This is why we turn to God. God is beyond all names and forms. God is beyond anything that we can say or think about God. What we need to do is turn in all humility and nothingness and ask God for help. Acknowledging our dependence on God is the first step toward humility. While the situation might not be like that

“Now faith is the assurance (reality) of things hoped for, the conviction (proof) of things not seen.” (Heb 11:1)

of Sodom and Gomorrah, the petitionary prayer of Abraham that God relent, is a pointer as to how we can pray (Gen 18:23-33). It also indicates who God is and who we are. We are (whether we acknowledge it or not) at God's mercy.

e. Faith

Over all the above, we must put on faith⁹. As Chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews so eloquently describes it, faith is a necessary element for every one of us as we struggle with this incomprehensible pandemic. The example of the exemplars of faith must spur us on. This faith is not merely intellectual assent, but an active faith which shows itself in deeds.¹⁰ Deeds in this context are: providing to researchers the best facilities and conditions in which to do the required research (in this context generosity is needed from the ones who have), ensuring that the poor, elderly, differently abled and all marginalized groups are looked after and provided for, giving to doctors and medical personnel as much support as possible in terms of acknowledgement of their services, providing the rest they require and looking after their needs of food and other basic amenities and assuring the populace at regular intervals that all that is necessary is being done and then turning to God with hope and faith.

Conclusion

The call to each one of us as we struggle to come to terms with the aftermath of the havoc caused by the novel Caronavirus is to remember that we are one human family. The virus makes no distinction whatever between rich and poor, male and female, black, brown, yellow or white. It treats all equally and infects all in a very similar manner. In like manner we too are called to journey with each other as companions and comrades on this journey of life. While we might not be able to walk hand-in-hand at this moment we can definitely walk together heart-in-heart.

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¹ Abram is Abram which is translated as “exalted ancestor” till God tells him that he will no longer be called Abram but “Abraham” which means “ancestor of a multitude”. “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.” (Gen 17:5)

² A full account of how Moses became God's instrument may be read in Ex 5-12. Moses' perseverance is noteworthy. Though he tries to reason with Pharaoh and appeal to him humbly, Pharaoh will not heed. Despite this, however, Moses does not give up but perseveres.

³ See Attridge, Harold, W., *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia, 1989

⁴ For the correct chronological list see Judges 4-16; 1 Sam 1 and 1 Sam 16

⁵ For the fulfillment of promises to Barak see Judg 5:1-7; Gideon (Judg 6:11-16); Jephthah (Judg 11:29-35); Samson (Judg 13:25); and David (2 Sam 5:19)

⁶ Jesus' response in Lk 13:1-9 is instructive in this regard. When Jesus is told about the Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate (possibly because they had revolted against the Romans) in the temple so that their blood was mingled with the blood of the animals who had also been slaughtered for sacrifice in the Temple, Jesus responds by stating that tragedy or catastrophe (like we are now experiencing) is not the measure of the sinfulness of the world or even of one's need to repent. He goes on to give the example of a natural tragedy (the collapse of the Tower of Siloam) to make the same point but also to state emphatically that everyone needs to repent or look at life anew.

⁷ In Mk 4:35-40, the miracle of the storm on the lake, the disciples accuse Jesus of just such an attitude when they ask “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4:38). Jesus, however, will point to their fear and lack of faith and is surprised by it (Mk 4:40).

⁸ See Desiree Rumbagh, <https://www.desireerumbaugh.com/love-is-stronger-than-fear-2/>; see also Michael Braunstein, *Love vs. Fear* <https://thereader.com/heartland-healing/the-two-emotions-love-vs-fear>, Ben Irwin, *Proving Love is stronger than Fear: Summer's Campaign*,

https://preemptivelove.org/blog/summer_downs_proving_love_is_stronger_than_fear/, Shona Keachie, Base your actions on love not fear, <https://byrslf.co/base-your-actions-on-love-not-fear-97287b756c55>

⁹ In Col 3:14, the Colossian community is told to put on love over compassion, kindness, humility and other qualities in the following words “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony”. While this is good advice, at the present moment and in the present situation faith that all will be for God’s glory and the good of humanity is as all-encompassing as love.

¹⁰ James 2:14-26 describes in detail what a passive and an active faith it. He concludes by stating that a faith which does not show itself in works is dead. Faith cannot be shown apart from works. They go hand in hand.

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Paschal Mystery: Experience of Martyrdom Today

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Do you wish to honour the Body of Christ? Do not ignore Him when he is naked. Do not pay homage in the temple clad in silk -- only then to neglect Him outside where He suffers cold and nakedness. Today when the celebration of the Eucharist in public is not allowed, the Paschal Mystery becomes all the more relevant for the cries and agony of Corona affected people. The Paschal Mystery is to be understood as the process of dying and rising, death and new life. If we look around, we see this occurrence all around us and in our own lives. The Paschal Mystery is not merely about our own salvation. It is a call to continue Christ’s mission, which implies that all people know the saving power of God. The final event in the Paschal Mystery, the Ascension, marks the beginning of the mission of the Church. During the Ascension, Christ gives the Apostles their mission, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). Soon after this, the Apostles receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, empowering them for this mission.

Paschal Mystery

Paschal Mystery is Jesus Christ's passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension. We learn from Jesus that new life can come from death, that we can find meaning in tough times, that there really is light in the darkness. It can be considered as the commitment by which Jesus glorified his Father and brought salvation to the world. The word "paschal" is the equivalent of Greek "πάσχα" (*pascha*), which is derived from Aramaic "*pashā*" and Hebrew "*pesah*", meaning "the passing over." (cf. Ex 12:13.23.27; cf. Is 31:5). According to the understanding of our salvation history, creation was the first pasch as there was a passing over from chaos to creation or order. Immediately after it we have the second and a series of them follow. The second pasch is immediately after the fall of the first parents. Abraham, the father of faith, is chosen to realize the new pasch. He accepts the call of God (Gen 12: 1-4). Following this is the next stage of slavery of the Hebrews and liberation through the intervention of Moses. Finally, the realization and redemption of the new pasch through Jesus Christ by his passion, death and resurrection.

Mystery in the context of Paschal Mystery is the message which was a mystery hidden for generations and has been revealed to his saints (Col 1: 25-26; Eph 1: 9-10). It is the realization of the plan in Christ. "The mystery is Christ among you, your hope and glory" (Col 1: 26-29). It is salvation in Christ made available through the ministry of the apostles. Mystery is the tradition of the early Church. As we

"Jesus took upon himself the prophetic criticism of cultism and even surpassed it by insisting that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to complete them. He began by attacking the formalism and verbosity of the prayers of the Pharisees and placed worship of praxis important." – Rafel Avila

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understand, the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery from the time of Christ's ascension.

Paschal Mystery as Service

We live in a world dominated by injustice. Cruel, inhuman injustice is pervasive. It divides humanity into the First World and the Third World, the developed and the underdeveloped countries, the rich and the poor, almsgivers and beggars. We find injustice in all spheres of life all over the world. It dominates people, dictates to them, humiliates them and turns them into a herd. Therefore, the practice of foot washing becomes a very relevant theme in the context of Corona affected world. The responsibility to serve the one in need is the task desired by Jesus who had the humility to be at the service of the others who were his disciples. Rafel Avila in his book, *Worship and Politics* says, "Jesus took upon himself the prophetic criticism of cultism and even surpassed it by insisting that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to complete them. He began by attacking the formalism and verbosity of the prayers of the Pharisees and placed worship of praxis important."

There is a legend of St. Francis of Assisi. In his early days when he was very wealthy; nothing but the best was good enough for him. He belonged to the aristocrat of the aristocrats. One day he was riding alone outside the city when he saw a leper, a mass of sores, a horrible sight. Ordinarily the fastidious Francis would have recoiled in horror from this hideous wreck of humanity. The sight moved him to do something; he dismounted from his horse and flung his arms around the leper; and



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as he embraced him and the leper turned into the figure of Jesus. This is what Jesus is trying to tell us by the service he does to his disciples. The nearer we are to suffering humanity, the nearer we are to God.

Paschal Mystery as Memorial

Jesus told the disciples, “This is my body” and he also said, “You saw Me hungry and you gave Me no food” and “Whatever you did for the least of My brothers, you did also for Me”. What good is it if the Eucharistic Table is overloaded with golden chalices, when He is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying His hunger, and then, with what is left, you may adorn the altar as well. The temple of our afflicted neighbor's body is holier than the altar of stone on which you celebrate the holy sacrifice. You are able to contemplate this altar everywhere, in the street and in the open squares (St. John Chrysostom). Pedro Arrupe highlights this perspective in one of his conferences, “If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world.” In the Eucharist, we receive Christ hungering in the world. He comes to us, not alone, but with the poor, the oppressed, the starving of the earth. Through him, they are looking to us for help, for justice, for love expressed in action. Therefore, we cannot properly receive the Bread of Life unless at the same time we give the bread of life to those in need wherever and whoever they may be.

Among other things, the Eucharist commemorates Jesus’

The Eucharist commemorates Jesus’ brokenness, his poverty, his body being broken and his blood being poured out. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin expresses this explicitly when he suggests that the wine offered at the Eucharist symbolizes precisely the brokenness of the poor.

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brokenness, his poverty, his body being broken and his blood being poured out. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin expresses this explicitly when he suggests that the wine offered at the Eucharist symbolizes precisely the brokenness of the poor. In a sense, the true substance to be consecrated each day is the world’s development during that day – the bread symbolizing appropriately what creation succeeds in producing, the wine (blood) what creation causes to be lost in exhaustion and suffering in the course of that effort. The Eucharist offers up the tears and blood of the sick in today’s context when many people are sick and dying and invites us to help alleviate the conditions that produce tears and blood.

Christ Himself set the foundation for uniting our sacrifices with His for the sake of our salvation and for the salvation of others. He instructs His disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24–25). The Church holds martyrs as exemplars of the Paschal Mystery because of the high price they paid in following Christ. We endure these sacrifices not on our own power, but by seeing them as extensions of Christ’s Passion. In prayer we consciously unite our sacrifices—even the suffering we do not choose, such as the suffering caused by illness or accidents—with Christ’s Passion and death.

Conclusion

To say that the Paschal Mystery calls us to justice and service originates in Jesus who, drawing upon the great prophets of old, assures us that the validity of all worship will ultimately be judged by how it affects the people who are in need, particularly the sick and dying. And we do that, as a famous church hymn says, by moving “from worship into service”. We don’t go to the Eucharist only to worship God by expressing our faith and

devotion. It is a communal act of worship which, among other things, calls us to go forth and live out in the world. It is a non-negotiable challenge from



God to each of us to work at changing the conditions that cause tears and blood. The Eucharist calls us to love tenderly, but, just as strongly, it calls us to act in justice and love. Many nurses, doctors and health workers have dedicated their lives for the sick and dying. Many of them have done this in spite of knowing the fact that the disease is contagious and they are exposed to danger. In the process, some of them had to sacrifice their lives in service. Such martyrs have the experience of living the Paschal Mystery today. They have broken their body and shed their blood for others. God is inviting us to build the kingdom of heaven on earth. Victory is assured as the Lord assures, “See I make all things new!” (Rev. 21:5).

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Calling Out of the Grave of Death

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The desperate dance of death and the search for meaningfulness in life haunts the whole world today. We are standing before the Crucified Lord trying to understand what He wishes to reveal to us during this season of the True Lent in our lives. There is real Gethsemane, real Way of the Cross, real Suffering and real Death everywhere. How does it make sense? How and where do we see the ray of hope? When will we be really able to sing Hosanna, Alleluia, He is Risen?

The present world that is infected by the virus, is being sent, day by day, person by person, country by country into the Grave of Death. But our Lord is more powerful than the power of evil and death. The Lord is calling us out of the Grave of Death to the Grace of Depth.

To Live as God's People

Today more than ever before, we feel the need to see the face of Jesus, to feel His presence, to experience His power. It becomes our intense prayer that the Lord our God may let God's face shine upon us; that God may help us to experience God's promises fulfilled, just as the people of God experienced in the old times, just as the beloved of Jesus experienced in the time

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of God in solidarity with God's people, God the Immanuel – God who saves – Jesus our Lord.

We are created to live. It is the promise of God that in the midst of adversity, God will be closer to us, leading us to fullness of life. The imageries of 'Waters', 'Burning Bush', the 'Valley of Bones' and the 'Grave of Lazarus' symbolize paradoxically adversity in the life of the people of God and God's protecting and life-giving presence in their midst.



The 'Waters' of the great flood due to the rain for forty days and forty nights swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days. But God remembered Noah and every creature that was 'in the ark of God'. It is God's promise that never again will God destroy living creatures (Gen 7-9). Only condition is that we respond to the invitation of God to "go into our ark" in these troubled times. The 'Burning Bush' signifies God's burning love for the suffering people of God: "I have observed the misery of my people... I have heard their cry... I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them..." (Ex 3). It is God's promise that in the midst of hopelessness God will cause breath to enter the dead bones in the Valley of dry Bones and they shall live and He shall be their God and they shall be His people (Ezek 37).

It is the will of God that we live and become God's people. God wants to bring us out from the troubled waters in our time to new life, from our misery, suffering and death to experience freedom and prosperity, from the valley of bones to life in its fullness. Jesus comes to give us that fullness of life. He has come to call us out of our graves, to transform us from dry bones into a new creation. The imagery of the 'Grave of Lazarus' (Jn 11) is an assurance of this truth. Jesus is the Resurrection and Life; Jesus is the Messiah, the

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Son of God; and everyone who lives and believes in Jesus will never die. Those who trust like Lazarus – God is my help – will hear the life giving voice of the Lord: Lazarus come out!

Sharing the Burden of Each Other: From the Grave of Death to the Grace of Depth.

As followers of Christ, we are called to take away the burden from the lives of people and lead them to total freedom from sin, sickness and suffering, unbound them from the clutches of death in order to experience life in Christ. With our help, the Lord wants to call the many dead Lazarus back to life. We could do this with patience, faith and prayer in our troubled time, when many of us think that God is absent, indifferent and sleeping.

The meditation of Pope Francis on 27th March 2020 during the prayer service on the steps of St Peter's Basilica, invites us to echo the words of the panicked Disciples: "Lord we are perishing, do you not care for us?" (Mk 4:38). Is Jesus sleeping in our turbulent times? Many of us think it so. But He is there with us in the ark of our life. He would not let it sink. Do not be afraid. Have faith.

In the words of Pope Francis: "We have an anchor: by His Cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by His Cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by His Cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from His redeeming love."

We focus our attention on the Crucified Lord who confined Himself to the Tomb in order to draw us out of death. We spend time in the presence of the Lord, with depth, silence and prayer, remaining in the tomb created by the virus of

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**He has overcome death
and has made for us
Resurrection possible.
Believe and we shall live
and shall sing
meaningfully Hosanna,**

death. We go into our ark and listen to Him in the depth of misery and death. He is calling us out of the Grave of Death to the Grace of Depth.

The Empty Tomb

In the midst of all these images, one image stands out: The Empty TOMB. It is only after the grain of wheat dies, that it would produce much fruit. Through the passage that goes through the empty



tomb does one enter into life. The empty tomb assures us that HE is not there in the midst of the dead. HE IS RISEN and is calling us out of our graves, leading us from darkness to Light, from untruth to Truth, from death to Life. Now it is the Emmaus time, a time to encounter the Risen Lord in spite of death and despair, loneliness and hopelessness, to let Him walk with us while it is getting dark, to let Him open to us the scripture and make our hearts burning with Hope, Optimism and Peace, to see Him in His Glory with our own eyes in the midst of the dance of death. It is a time to return to our people, like the Disciples on the way to Emmaus, to proclaim to them that the Lord is risen, death is defeated, new life has sprouted. The Risen Lord is inviting us to return back to Him in the depth of our being, asking us to listen to and respond to the voice that invites us to be co-creators, compassionate Healers, and Messengers of Hope.

Conclusion

Let us continue to respond with faith, patience and courage from the depth of our being till our world becomes the Promised reality – A New Heaven and a New Earth – where every tear will be wiped

away – death will be defeated and we shall experience the fullness of life. That is why He has come. He has overcome death and has made for us Resurrection possible. Believe and we shall live and shall sing meaningfully Hosanna, Alleluia, He is Risen!!!

“We have an anchor: by His Cross we have been saved. We have a rudder: by His Cross we have been redeemed. We have a hope: by His Cross we have been healed and embraced so that nothing and no one can separate us from His redeeming love.” – Pope Francis



Living Together, Dying Alone?

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Plague Judges Everyone!

Samskara (A rite for a dead man) is a great and an inspiring Kannada novel by Jnanapeetha award winner Late U. R. Anatumurthy. It basically critiques the unjust Brahminical social hierarchical system in the context of an epidemic caused by death of many rats. The story begins with the death of Naranappa, a Brahmin who had married a lower caste woman and had broken the Brahminical way of life by eating meat and drinking alcohol. The questions here are: Can his cremation be done according to the Brahminical rites as he had profaned the purity of Brahmins? Can the Dalits enter Brahmin houses to perform the last rites? Does Brahminism leave him though he had left it? Till the last rites are performed Brahmins cannot consume food. As this issue remained unsettled for a long time the epidemic arose and people began to die. The outbreak of disease gave an impartial judgement of death to everyone by putting an end to all kinds of divisions and discriminations based on caste and colour. When human life, existence and survival confronts with caste, division, communalism, partiality etc. the latter loses its battle. The story tells us that Plague judges everyone.

Everyone has Plague!

The 20th-century French existential philosopher Albert Camus's widely read novel *The Plague* (*La Peste*) is relevant today from the context of COVID-19. The key idea of his philosophy is 'life is

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absurd and death renders it meaningless.' A large number of people die in the city of Oran in Algeria due to Plague.

Administration becomes both blind and deaf to the reality and people live in

crisis and disaster. A parish priest preaches people that it is a punishment from God for human sins. Dr. Rieux treats all the affected people, including the priest who had an unrelated illness. The novel reveals the value of love, sacrifice, goodwill and friendship. It shows the absurd, vulnerable and precarious condition of human beings. Camus writes, "Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; ... There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise." Camus expresses in the novel that 'everyone has inside it himself this plague, because no one in the world, no one, can ever be immune.' The story mirrors the plight of humans with death as an individual act and community event from which there is no escape. It also metaphorically speaks about the time of World War II, the divisive ideologies, the role of religion, mechanized life, the authoritarianism and silence of responsible leaders. Thus, 'plague' affects everyone.

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Distancing the Distance of Doubt!

John Donne, the 17th-century English poet wrote: "No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main, ... Any man's death diminishes me, because I'm involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." The deadly pandemic



COVID-19 had made not only humanity but also human themselves ‘an island.’ The government administration has asked us to distance ourselves from each other through a lockdown and even we have distanced ourselves from others both for good and bad. The trust and belief with others to welcome, accept, reach out and accommodate others was not possible due to great fear, panic and anxiety of the nature of the disease. The positive side of distancing is to cut the transmission chain of the virus.

“Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; ... There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.”
Albert Camus

There have been many incidents where people have distanced themselves even in the cases of emergency. For instance, a 41-year-old man from Managluru died in Kodagu in an unfortunate way. He collapsed in the bathroom while bathing. His mother cried for the help from the neighbours but no one came forward out of the fear of coronavirus (NewsKarnataka. 2020). If this is one harsh side of the reality there is also another side, viz. Covid-19 has made all of us to live together as families. It has enabled us to engage ourselves with our parents and siblings and spend quality time with them. In this context, we need to reflect more on inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of human life, existence and death.

Empirical and Existential Insights

Empirically human beings are social by nature. Coming together and living together is fundamental to a human existence fulfilled through family and society. There is mutual dependence in any human institution, whether it is social or political in nature. Scientifically we are made up of cells, molecules and atoms which are inter-connected. In death, our material body becomes one with

the material universe. A metaphysical understanding of human beings as related to one another is meaningfully explained by existential philosophers like Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber etc. We shall reflect on the reality of life and death, along with them.



Being is Belonging

Gabriel Marcel states that we live in a community. For him, being is belonging. ‘I am not an individual, but I am a whole being having a rapport with the other.’ The ‘other’ constitutes the essence of my ‘self.’ Existence is co-existence and being present for the other. He says that we are living in a ‘broken world.’ Humans are alienated from each other due to mechanization, artificiality and objectification of relationships. Hence, he proposes a relationship of dialogue coupled with availability and freedom.

To Be is to be with

Intersubjectivity is the key idea of Martin Buber. He upholds, “to be is to be with the other.” The human person is essentially a relation and is called to live in relationship. Being together is intrinsic to human existence. Dialogue is the very essence of human life. Dialogue cannot be realized without my communication with the other. He points out two kinds of relationships, i.e., and ‘I-it’ and ‘I-Thou.’ ‘I-it’ is a relationship between subject and object wherein the other is objectified or commodified, whereas ‘I-Thou’ is a relationship between subject and subject. ‘I-Thou,’ presupposes mutuality, acceptance and reciprocity.

To Be is to Die

Human beings live together and co-existence constitutes the core of human living. The next questions in this line that pops up are: If human beings live together, do they die together? Can a person die alone? The philosophy of Martin Heidegger provides rich insights on this issue. Heidegger says that *Dasein* (being) is always 'being-with' and is a 'being-for-death' or 'being-towards-death.' Human being by nature and essence is with others but destined for death. As soon as *Dasein* comes to life, it marches towards the possibility of death. The ultimate end is 'already present' but 'not yet' realized. We can summarize Heidegger's thought on death as 'to be is to die.'

Death is an individual act. It is the most authentic, unique and personal moment of one's life. We can never experience death. One cannot substitute death. In death, one cannot choose, cheat, distract, disown or escape. There is no camouflage in death because it brings authenticity to my existence. I shall be isolated from all things. At the moment of death, others can say, "we are with you," but finally 'I have to die.' I have to face death alone. Death puts me in direct contact with myself.

Is Dying Alone?

Physically a person dies alone. Even from a social or psychological perspective death is an individual act. There is separation from everyone and isolation from everything. Even when one is surrounded by others, one has to die alone. But is he alone metaphysically? It is a complex question without a final and absolute answer.

As a Christian philosopher, I assert that we are a community of the faithful. We are One Holy Catholic Pilgrim Church bound together in joys and sorrows. The final test of our faith is judged on the basis of our reaching out, sharing and caring for others. It is true that a

"Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal." Thomas Moore

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person dies alone. But we, as believers and followers of Jesus Christ, believe that he is not alone. On the Cross, at the time of death, the helpless cry of Jesus was, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). But the purpose of his life and death was to manifest the truth of "Immanuel," i.e., "God is with us." Christian faith is that even when it seems like the world is falling apart, God is still in control. St. Thomas Moore believes, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."



God says in the Old Testament: "I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol; I shall redeem them from death. O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes" (Hosea 13:14). In the context of Covid-19, the suffering person feels the absence of the 'Absolute Reality' which has to liberate him or her. The situation in today's world has reached almost to 'living alone' and 'dying together.'

Why did God harden the heart of Pharaoh which brought about disaster to Israelites? Scripture reveals that God sent ten plagues as a consequence of disobedience and idolatry. They had to bear those plagues in Egypt as 'signs and marvels' of Yahweh. It was a part of God's judgement against sin and his plan to manifest love and mercy. At the end, the people of Yahweh experienced liberation from the slavery in Egypt i.e., God is with them (Exodus, chaps.7-11).

It is said, "Doctor binds the wound and God heals it." We continue to believe in the God-given wisdom to the medical fraternity, i.e., nurses, doctors, scientists etc. Today we all

require each other more than anything. Our relationships need to transcend the world of things, machines and objects. The ‘other’ is irreducible and inevitable to me. The ‘other’ is not a burden but a gift and opportunity to me to assert the depth of my own ‘self.’ Let us make Covid-19 +ve, a negative virus and spread co-existence as a ‘positive reality’ for we don’t live or die alone, rather we live and die together.

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“By His Wounds We Are Healed:” Meditation on the Five Wounds of Jesus

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“⁴Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.” (Is.53:4-5 NIV)

Centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus prophet Isaiah prophesied the barbaric event of the Crucified, the suffering Servant of Yahweh. Early Christians saw its literal happening on calvary a. Innocent Servant of God suffered the wages of sin in his body for the redemption of humanity. Prophet Isaiah prophesied that ‘by his wounds we will be healed’.

Due to COVID 19 the whole humanity is going through suffering in body, mind and spirit. Let’s approach the crucified who is still hung on Calvary all over the world so as to receive healing touch from his wounds. In our imagination lets travel back in time to Calvary where the event took place. With much reverence we shall take up this journey. In our heart let our prayer be from the hymn Stabat Mater “Holy Mother pierce me through/In my heart each wound renew/of my savior crucified.”

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As I arrive at Calvary, I see already the body of Jesus is laid in the hands of Mother Mary. There let me stand close to his body gazing at each wound, clotted blood, broken flesh, gaping wounds pierced by the nails.

“Holy Mother pierce me through/In my heart each wound renew/of my savior crucified.” Stabat Mater

The Right Hand

Let me look at the wound of the **right hand** of Jesus pierced by the nail. Gaping wound, flesh torn apart. I hold the right hand of Jesus in my hand and kiss the wound with reverence and devotion. I recall to mind what these hands have done for humanity. These hands touched the lepers, and were healed. These hands touch the eyes of the visually impaired, speech impaired, hearing impaired and they were made whole. These hands distributed food to the hungry, washed the feet of his disciples, broke the bread and gave the wine poured out for the salvation of the humanity and asked his disciples to do the same. In this innocent and loving hand pierced by the nail, into that wound I place all those who are suffering from COVID 19 and I pray that they all be healed.

The Left Hand

Then I proceed to the **left hand of Jesus**. With reverence and devotion I kiss that wound. I recall to my mind the works these hands have done. These hands lifted Talitha who was dead, the young man of Nain was given life. These hands blessed the water into wine and saved the family from embarrassment. These hands touched the broken ear of the soldier Malchus and he was healed. These hands lifted Peter who was drowning in the sea. These hands prepared breakfast to his disciples on the bank of the lake Tiberias. Into this hand pierced by the nail I place all the bereaved members of the family who have lost their loved ones due to the COVID 19. I pray that the Lord may console and strengthen them.

The Right Foot

Now I move to the feet of Jesus. I hold **the right foot of Jesus** in my hand. With reverence and devotion I kiss that wound. As I gaze at that wound I recall to my mind what these feet have done for humanity. He walked and walked to the towns and villages of Palestine. As he travelled he preached about the Kingdom of God. Preached the good news to the poor and the broken hearted. He went in search of sinners. He walked on the sea shore and invited young to follow him so as to continue His mission. He walked into the house of Peter and healed his mother in law. He went to the house of Simon the Pharisee and taught him about love and mercy. He went to the house of Zacchaeus inviting him to experience the joy of salvation. He walked to the temple and to the synagogue preaching and healing the sick. At his foot I bring all the health workers, doctors and people of good will who are engaged in serving those affected by Corona virus. I pray that they all be protected from. Their families be blessed with many graces.

The Left Foot

Now hold the **left foot of Jesus** in my hand. I kiss the wound with reverence and devotion. I recall to my mind what these feet have done. He walked his way to Jerusalem to face his HOUR destined by his Father. He walked his way to the garden of Gethsemane to pray so as to draw strength from His Father. He walked his way to Calvary carrying His cross. There he was nailed to the cross and hung on the cross till he breathed his





last. After the resurrection he walked to the places where his disciples were huddled together out of fear of the Jews. He brought them joy, peace and courage. He walked with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus revealing them to the meaning of the Scriptures about himself. To this feet now I bring all the political and ecclesial, religious leaders of the world. I pray that the Lord may strengthen them so that they will be enabled to deal with this crisis affecting the whole humanity.

The Pierced Side of Jesus

Now I stand close to the **pierced side of Jesus**. Soldiers wanted to confirm the death of Jesus. So one of them with a lance pierced his side and water and blood flowed. As I gaze at the pierced heart of Jesus, I recall to my mind how he was moved to compassion when he saw the crowds who were like sheep without shepherd. He asked his disciples to pray to the Father so that He will send more labourers to carry on the mission. He wept at the tomb of Lazar. He wept gazing at the city of Jerusalem which was not recognizing its time of salvation.

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Conclusion

After the resurrection he was moved with compassion to meet his frightened disciples who had lost all their hope. To this pierced side of Jesus, I bring all those persons who have lost their hope and feel imprisoned at home not knowing when all this will be over. Those poor persons, migrant labourers, unemployed, lonely, sick, living on the pavements, in the slums, who are hungry and thirsty so that they all be taken care by the generous people of good will.

I close this prayer thanking the Lord for his healing touches and say the prayer which the Lord has taught us “Our Father who art in heaven.....”

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To this pierced side of Jesus, I bring all those persons who have lost their hope and feel imprisoned at home not knowing when all this will be over. Those poor persons, migrant labourers, unemployed, lonely, sick, living on the pavements, in the slums, who are hungry and thirsty so that they all be taken care by the generous people of good will.



Suffering Unmasks God and Humans

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As Corona virus outbreak seems to be engulfing the entire human race one may wonder whether God has lost control of the universe? Or is He not caring for His creation which He created with much love, in His own image and likeness? Humanity is going through days of darkness, pain and affliction as Pope Francis says in his *Urbi et Orbi* prayer, “We find ourselves afraid and lost...caught off-guard by unexpected, turbulent storm...all of us fragile and disoriented...”. Hence hoping in the boundless mercy of God, he entrusts humanity to God.

At this point, a penetrating look into the reality of our own self both as individual and as human family and into God will help us to renew our love and communion with God, redefine our identity and to practice a reverential approach (a stewardship) to others and creation.

Book of Job and A Humanity Plagued by Covid-19

The point of the discussion here is not comparison between suffering of Job and our humanity plagued by Covid-19. All that we look for is some insight to our present position faced with this pandemic.

Book of Job is a beautiful piece of biblical literature that skilfully unmask what is true of God and of human beings faced with a question that is, human beings love and serve God because it pays to do so and God on his part rewards the virtue and punishes vice

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relinquishing his absolute sovereignty (cf. Job 1:9). The author of the Book of Job with extreme care and caution sheds profound insight into the truth of divine and human nature. The highly didactical book of Job tells us on the one hand how just God is in his great wisdom as is revealed in the ordering of

“We find ourselves afraid and lost...caught off-guard by unexpected, turbulent storm...all of us fragile and disoriented...” – Pope Francis

the universe and how extremely caring he is for the created beings, big and small. On the other hand, it poignantly tells us how human beings needs to relate to God specially when surrounded by afflictions on every side. From both the sides it is a disinterested love, a love just for the sake of the other.

Unmasking of God

Job and his friends knew God through traditional wisdom and from the teachings of the elders. Job’s friends with all the traditional wisdom advised of God and his ways in the creation asking Job to accept their teaching (Job 4–38). Nostalgic of his past experiences of personal intimacy with God, Job searches God’s real character amidst his suffering. While Job recalls the intimacy of a trusting relationship with God (10:12; 12:4), he accuses God being unjust in his dealing with him.

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Avowing his innocence Job insists God to come in person to reveal his intentions to him, to prove His justice. In the avowal of his innocence Job crosses the human boundary and blames God to be unjust, in other words, he is tempted to be superior to God. God understanding the danger of Job’s position, that his instance of innocence has become the hurdle between the personal relationship with God, and further it will turn to be pride, in his great care corrects Job. The caring God does not blame Job or does not seem to take offence but asks Job to

comprehend deeply the wisdom and care of God imprinted in the cosmos.

The questions of God remain enigma for Job that he acknowledges God's Majesty and says that "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear", meaning through the traditional teachings of wisdom and from the elders; "But now my eye sees Thee" meaning, he has come to experience him personally. (Job 41:5). In wonder and astonishment Job acknowledges the wisdom of God that designed cosmos, goodness which he extends even to the most insignificant creation and justice that rule the created order. He also acknowledges that he has been wrong by speaking about things about which he has no understanding. (Job 42:2-4). If God is just and caring to all His creation, will He not just to Job too, will He not take care of him? Therefore, Job surrenders his destiny with God.

As humanity has its limitation to comprehend God in his true nature, it often tends fashion a God of its own choice or convenience. The sufferings and afflictions in our personal life or that affect human family as in the case of COVID-19 are helps shed our fixations and to unmask the true nature of God.

Unmasking of True Human Self

Even though Job is no equal for Him, God asks him to gird up loins like a man and to answer him (Job 38:3). In spite his wretched state and infuriated words God acknowledges Job's human dignity and raises him from his low state. Job acknowledges that he has been speaking from derivative experience rather than from primary relationship with God. Consequently, he realizes that he has no claim on his personal integrity. In humility he stands before God and accept his mortality saying, "I retract, and I repent in dust and

God is not far from His children who suffer. His heart is grieved for their misery and He bears us in His love. He will surely respond.

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ashes" (Job 42:6). Thus, sufferings help us to shed human pride and arrogance and brings true perception of the self. As humanity has its limitation to comprehend God in his true nature, it often tends fashion a God of its own choice or convenience. The sufferings and afflictions in our personal life or that affect human family as in the case of COVID-19 are helps to unmask our identity.



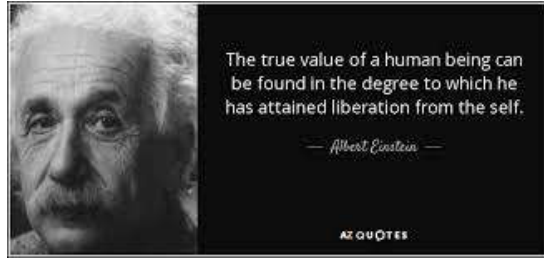
Job's loves and trust in God is expressed in his faithful devotion to God (1:1,5). God himself had high regard for him and call him "my servant Job". God's confidence in Job is expressed in his words "there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil." (Job 1:8). However, in His response to Job God does not make any **Reference** to Job's innocence. The book of Job teaches that there can be nothing in between God and human person even his/her own pursuit for virtue. An over emphasis of even virtues can become a obstacle to the divine-human communion.

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Conclusion

Suffering is a mystery. The pain, loss and grief caused by Covid-19 is beyond compare but God is not far from His children who suffer. His heart is grieved for their misery and He bears us in His love. He will surely respond. We need to remember that God's response to Job was not as expected by Job, his friends or the readers. Similarly, His response to us may not be the one that we expect. Probably He wants us to know something more of the Mystery of God beyond our traditional knowledge of Him. Such a knowledge can be learned only from

a personal experience and it will emerge as a new spirituality characterised by divine-human communion, re-discovery of personal identity and a reverential approach to the others and creation (stewardship).



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Corona of Thorns and Crown of Glory

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CCOVID-19 or Corona—crown, in Latin—has capped and crippled nations with a virulent virus that has brought everyone to their knees. Almost everyone today is reflecting, praying, and seeking remedies to right wrongs. I’ve never felt so helpless, homebound; yet, as a religionist, I’m hopeful that ‘religion’—from the Latin *religare*, meaning, ‘to bind’—will bind us more tightly to God, mother earth and each other during this ‘home-bound’ period. So, let’s reflect upon the corona-crowns that we have wrongly conferred or conveniently condoned.

The Crown of God

Crown is a rich biblical symbol with many meanings, positive and negative. First, crowns are used for the enthronement of Israel’s kings and queens (2 Kings 11:12; 1 Chron 20:2; 2 Chron 23:11; Esther 2:17; 8:15). Second, though the ruler wears the crown, it’s actually God, Universal Ruler, who “sets a crown of fine gold on his head” (Ps 21:3); hence the king is but God’s representative, expected to reign as God would. Third, if the king forgets his subordinate relationship with God, God denounces him for he has “defiled his crown in the dust” (Ps 89:39). Fourth, rulers in authority must realize their finitude and frailty: “for riches do not last forever, nor a crown for all generations” (Prov 27:24).

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These **References** clearly teach us that crowns belong solely to God, the Ultimate Sovereign, who creates, sustains, and nurtures everything and everyone in the cosmos. In a beautiful hymn “Great is your name, Lord,” based on psalm 8, the psalmist says of human beings, “You have made them a little less than God, and crowned them with glory and honour” (Ps 8:5). As created beings, instead of glorifying God, have we not dethroned God and crowned ourselves as demigods making money, manipulating markets, grabbing power? These crowns have crumbled.

“You have made them a little less than God, and crowned them with glory and honour”

Jesus teaches us that God is Spirit and Truth—accessible anytime, everywhere, by everyone—in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:23). Though despised by others, Jesus frees her from manmade categories. In gratitude, she spreads the good news of her encounter with him, and brings her whole village to proclaim that Jesus is: “truly, the Saviour of the world” (Jn 4:42). We have hitherto felt secure worshipping God in churches. Now, rather than bemoaning the shutdown of churches, may we feel at home with God, realizing that our homes are ‘domestic churches’.

In the ‘domestic church’ which is my home, let me pilgrimage inside, deep into *‘who’* is deepest within me—the God-gifted ‘I’ that, according to the Bible, is an image of God. This true ‘self’ is not the same as the ‘Ego’ that seeks to grab things selfishly for itself, always relating with others for self-interest. It’s time now to discover what St Augustine called *‘intimior intimo meo’*—that which is ‘deeper than my own depths’. This true self must flourish with right relationships.

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The Crown of Thorns



WhatsApp has been keeping us abreast of what’s happening, worldwide. We’ve seen clips of robots serving food in Wuhan, Korean medicos dressed like astronauts to cure the sick, Europeans gasping for breath in overcrowded ICUs and Californians rushing to buy guns, should goods run out and goons run amuck. These heartrending snapshots have enforced social distancing. However, isn’t social distancing something we’ve mastered ages ago? Often, our societal crowns are clear-cut: ‘I’ above all else; We versus They; male over female; patriot versus antinational; insiders against outsiders. What we’re sheepishly seeing now is the concretization of our infected minds.

Coronaviruses don’t distinguish between President and pauper. Today, UK’s Prince Charles and PM Boris Johnson are self-isolated, weak and powerless, just like other victims. This reminds us that the air we breathe and the waters we bathe in are one, while coronary arteries universally have same blood-groups, positive or negative. Mother earth invites us to inhale fresh air and savour the once-silenced symphony of insects and birds. The swans at Venice and otters of Singapore are reclaiming their habitats. Homebound humanity has birthed clearer skies, cleaner seas, saner surroundings, fruitfulness of flora, freedom for fauna. Be glad, be grateful.

We are currently in the period of Lent—literally meaning ‘springtime’—in preparation for the Holy Week of Jesus’ passion and death. The excruciating crown that was thrust upon Jesus’ head was braided together with thorns, mockingly placed with a “Hail, king of the Jews!” jibe (Jn 19:3). Beaten, bloody and broken, Jesus is then brought face-to-face with another

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crowned character: Pontius Pilate. Captive Christ stands tall with his inner, spiritual authority, while Roman Governor Pilate brags of his imperial power. Christ is crowned with thorns; Pilate is clad in gold. While Jesus is bathed in blood, Pilate washes his bloodied hands, declaring, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves!” (Mt 27:24)

While Jesus is bathed in blood, Pilate washes his bloodied hands, declaring, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves!”

Today, not only Christians but peoples of the whole world feel crowned with thorns, tired and tense—not knowing when all of this will end. The light at the end of the tunnel is nowhere in sight. Perhaps, these days in the runup to Holy Saturday, the masks, handwashes, sanitizers, closedowns and distances call for unmasking of pretenses, soul-cleansing, purging of prejudices, openness and intimacy with God, with others, with mother earth and with our deepest self. As Christians, life does not end with death but with eternal life.

Conclusion: Crown of Glory

In conclusion, let’s remember that, besides the aforementioned crowns, apostle Paul speaks of the “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:8) that awaits those who are faithful to Christ. Moreover, apostles James and John describe the “crown of life” for those who love God and persevere under trials (Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10). Let us never lose hope! Covid-19 imposes a crown of thorns upon our swollen heads, but our cooperation, compassion and co-vitality throughout 2020 might raise us, not mere victims but victors over Corona – destroying our manmade, infected coronations, too – to attain that “crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4) promised by the Crucified-Risen Christ, who will wear the “golden crown” (Rev 14:14). He alone will rule forever! I wish you a Happy Easter, too!



Easter in the Time of COVID-19

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The feast of Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Jesus was willing to go to his passion and death despite being very afraid, only because he believed it was the will of his Father.

The courage and faith of Jesus at this time of trial is evident and we can draw lessons from it in the present situations in which we find ourselves and as our world struggles with the pandemic of COVID-19 caused by the Caronavirus.

Our Fear

A. **Jesus’ Fear:** Often, fear arises because we are faced with what might seem like insurmountable and overwhelming odds. In the case of Jesus, the fear of death arose because as a Jew he would have believed that death meant total annihilation.

The Synoptic Gospels are blunt when they narrate the fear of Jesus in Gethsemane before his arrest (Mk 14:34; Mt 26:37). The Gospel of Luke shows the fear of Jesus even more vividly (Lk 22:44). No community would have written about its Lord in such a manner if there was no historical core to these incidents. **However, Jesus does not let fear overwhelm him.** He does – and this is clearer in retrospect – the best thing he could do in the given situation: he prays (Mk 14:32; Mt 26:36).

B. Our Fear: The fear that many of us may feel in the present situation of COVID-19 is similar to that which Jesus felt. We too are faced with what seem at this moment like insuperable and undefeatable odds. We are struggling to contain and find a cure for infection due to the Corona virus, but it does not seem to be working as we would like.



Like Jesus, we must do what seems best under the circumstances namely, we must turn to God.

Our Dependence on God

A. Jesus' dependence on God: Even before he could begin praying, Jesus threw himself on the ground (Mk 14:35). At the time of Jesus, people prayed in one of two ways: standing (Lk 18:11,13) or kneeling (Mk 1:40; Acts 9:40). Prostration on the part of Jesus was unusual possibly because it was an unusual situation. This act of prostration communicated three things:

- a. It acknowledged the Almighty nature of God
- b. It acknowledged the nothingness of Jesus and
- c. It acknowledged that Jesus was available to do God's will.

Our dependence on God: Like Jesus we need to acknowledge that God is Almighty and all-powerful. We must acknowledge that even though there have been many and great advancements in science and technology, when it comes to finding a cure for a tiny virus we are incapable and powerless. It is only the higher power who can come to our aid. It is therefore time for reconciliation or a ceasefire of all our differences that we will work toward with one heart and one mind. Now is the time for unity even in our diversity.

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Our Prayer

A. Jesus' prayer: The prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane can be divided into three parts as follows:

- a. Addressing God
- b. An acknowledgement of the Almighty nature of God
- c. A petition (asking for what he wants)
- d. Ceding the initiative to God

3a. Jesus addressed God as "Father". This indicates intimacy on the one hand and trust on the other. He also acknowledges that he trusts that God (because God is father) will do what is best for him.

3b. Through the words "for you all things are possible" (Mk 14:36), Jesus acknowledges that nothing is outside the scope of God's power. Nothing is impossible for God (Lk 1:37)

3c. In his petition, Jesus asks **unashamedly** for what he wants namely: "remove this cup from me (Mk 14:36). The cup here refers to the cross.

3d. By the addition of the words, "yet, not what I want, but what you want." (Mk 14:36), Jesus shows that **DESPITE** his fear and despite what he thinks is best for him, he is willing to drink the cup **BECAUSE** it is the Father's will.

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B. Our prayer: Since God is bigger than any and all names or titles, it does not matter what name or title we use. What is important is to believe that God cares for us and our world and wants all of us to be saved and live in peace and harmony.

We must acknowledge that even though there have been many and great advancements in science and technology, when it comes to finding a cure for a tiny virus we are incapable and powerless.

What You Want

We must pray with confidence, faith and trust in God who **WILL** listen to our prayer. However, even as we do so, we must remember to add at the end of our prayer like Jesus did, “yet, not what I [we] want, but what you want.”

A. Jesus’ Perseverance in prayer and action:

It is noteworthy that at time in his life when he needed to hear God’s voice, there was apparently no response from God at all. Jesus interprets the silence of God to mean that he must do what God wills which here is the **opposite** of what he wanted. He gets up from his prayer fortified.

This fortification is seen in the scene that follows immediately after the prayer of Jesus, which is his Arrest (Mk 14:44-52). The final words of Jesus to his captors are “...But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” (Mk 14:47) which here mean “Let God’s will be done”.

B. Our perseverance in prayer and action: It is fairly easy to begin well, but not as easy to persevere. Though Jesus did not receive an answer from God or a response to his prayer, he did not let that fact stop him from persevering in prayer. We must follow suit. It is likely that to find a cure may take time. However, this must not stop us from continuing to petition God and asking for God’s help in our hour of need. Like Jesus we must persevere.

Our Cross

A. Jesus’ Arrest, Mocking, Scourging and Crucifixion: The Markan Jesus is portrayed as one whom everyone has abandoned. His **disciples desert him and flee** (Mk 14:50); the **whole Sanhedrin** condemned him as deserving death (Mk 14:63), in order to ‘satisfy the crowd’ Pilate had Jesus scourged and handed over to

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can say with confidence that death is not the end. There is the hope of a new and better life in Christ.

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be crucified (Mk 15:15). Even as he hung on the cross he was taunted by the passers-by, the chief priests and those crucified with him (Mk15:30-32).



Not only does Jesus have no human support; at this hour he apparently receives no support even from God whom he addressed and knew as father as is evident in his cry, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34).

B. Our Crosses: At this moment there are many who will feel as abandoned as Jesus felt. There seems to be no support from any side. The psychological trauma will possibly be harder to bear than the physical.

The fallout of this pandemic will not only be on the ones who are infected but many others as well. The cry of all of us will be like the cry of Jesus.

The Vindication

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A. Jesus’ Vindication: Immediately at the death of Jesus there are two striking incidents which point to the vindication of Jesus. The first is that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” (Mk 15:38). In all probability this means that now true worship is not in the Temple but on the Cross. That this is so is confirmed by the second incident in which the Centurion (a Gentile and so an unbeliever) acclaims Jesus in the words, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mk 15:39)

B. Our Vindication: In the case of those of us who are ailing or will be infected, we will not be able to see the signs, but the

fact is that like Jesus we will be vindicated. In order for this to happen we must act like Jesus acted. This means that on our part we must do at every moment all that we have to do. We must not leave undone that which we have to do. We must take all the precautions that we have been advised to take and not test God. This is a time when strict discipline is required not only for one's own health's sake but also the sake of the health of others. It is possible that the foolishness or foolhardiness of some can cause great harm to many. This is why we need to be prudent and judicious. This does not mean however, that we must give in to fear. This can never be the response of one who has prayed. Fearlessness is called for, but fearlessness does not mean recklessness. This must be kept in mind.

Conclusion: The Absolute Vindication

Jesus' Absolute Vindication: More than the vindication on the natural level, it was the Resurrection of Jesus through which he was completely vindicated. In Mark this is portrayed through the Empty Tomb (Mk 16:1-8). The young man at the tomb confirms that Jesus is risen!!

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we can say with confidence that death is not the end. There is the hope of a new and better life. We can also say that even when we carry a heavy cross and see no light at the end of the tunnel or the rainbow on the horizon like is happening at this moment, we need only the eyes of faith to see that God walks with us every step of the way.

The disciples of Jesus are to proclaim to the world that no one must give up or give in even when there is no concrete or tangible proof. Like Jesus they must keep on 'keeping on.'

In the light of our celebration of Easter even as we grapple with the pandemic of COVID-19, we will keep the hope that the God of the Resurrection visible in Jesus will continue to be our hope.



Lectio Divina for the Time of COVID-19

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Are you serving directly in this fight to save the humanity?
You are, of course, engaged fully.
Just keep in your heart, "God, be in me, and be with us"

*Are you locked down at home?
There is a long time to pass
Alone, away, constrained, concerned...
Pass over gracefully.*

See well
The News, the updates, instructions, orders ...
The sick, the abandoned, the dying, the people in healthcare,
the fleeing migrants,
Read their pain, fear, hunger, health, fatigue,

Our own people - spouse, parents, children, friends...
There are lots of things to read attentively in them,
Which we never gave attention;
their love, likes, desires, complaints, silence...

See well the world, society, the poor, caretakers, the police,
the government...
Read attentively, the many cares that we took for granted.

See well the nature, the plants,
the animals, the air, the
water,
Read attentively the mysteries
we desacralized

Feel them
Feel what is seen and read,
Imagine the path they walk, hold
their pain, rejection,
neglect, struggle, fatigue,
fear ...

Express
Express them in gestures, sighs, or even in words,
Your heart might whisper just a word, 'O God.'
It is your sincere cry that involves your prayer for them,
repentance for what is neglected, gratitude for what is
seen as received.

Hear
Hear the voice of God, speaking to you and the whole of what
you have seen, read, felt and voiced.
Feel the consolation, comfort, and the presence of God for you
and for the world,
in hospitals, in streets, with the sick and the dying, with the
caretakers and the scientists, with the police and the
governments.
Firmly believe the presence of God, not just for your protection
and care, but all the more the presence with the sick and
the dying.
You could see the presence of God as a guest and a host within
the locked down house.
Since it is simple, it might be hard to practice.

**It might also fill you
with compassion,
tenderness, and
courage.
There will be healing,
miracle, and
reconciliation.**

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Make an attempt
trusting in grace
It might also fill you
with compassion,
tenderness, and
courage.
There will be healing,
miracle, and reconciliation.



LECTIO DIVINA
Reading the Scripture
Reflecting on the Meaning
Responding through Prayer
Resting in God
Responding in Action

Lectio Meditatio Oratio Contemplatio Operatio

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Helpless, But Not Hopeless

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When we look around, O Lord, there is tension, fear and angst all around.

Tension as to the present and future

Fear of death and sadness of the impending doom

Angst about our very life: disconnected, separate and anxious.

O Lord, it is dreadful!

It is cruel, but it can be still worse.

None seems to know how it is and how it will end.

The doctors may guide us, but they too are not in control.

None is in control of the situation.

O Lord, it is unimaginable!

When we hear the stories of sudden and unexpected death,

Funeral where no one gets an opportunity to say bye properly

Easter celebrations with hardly any people around

Going around in masks and in distress.

O Lord, it is unbearable!

So many of us suffer intensely

From hunger, loneliness and emergencies

From not knowing what has happened to the beloved

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From the sudden death of
the dear ones!

O Lord, it is terrible!

Is there an end to this?

How many will perish

before the end?

Who can measure the pain
and suffering

Of those who died and left behind?

O Lord, it is awful!

Even in our suffering

Some wants to make

Even our death

Is politicised for power!

How tragic Lord!

The situation looks hopeless!

Miserable and beyond future!

Precisely in these hopeless

Emerges Thy promise and our hope!

You are our hope, the only hope!

So, we want to trust in you.

For we have nowhere else to go!

None else to confide in!

You, you alone, have the words of eternal life.

O Lord, we long for it!

The life eternal that you promised

Can come even through depression and death.

Through pain and misery

Through our own cross!

O Lord, help us to surrender!



So, we want to hope, hope in
you!
In you we want to trust!
Help our lack of trust and hope!
You only can lift us up!
We want to trust in you.



The hope of all of us – humans and non-humans
The destiny of the universe
The future of ours
Lies in you and in you alone.
So helpless we are, hopeless we do not want to remain!