

SEASON OF CREATION-1ST SEPTEMBER TO 4TH OCTOBER 2020

Fact Sheet 4- Christian Response to Covid-19

I. Introduction: Many Christians across the globe are angry with God for having in their opinion created malevolent viruses. Some consider Covid-19 as God's judgment of international sin in the world, while a few fundamentalist religionists, using rationalization, say that God is punishing us for our sins. A few mystics view the pandemic as one of the most vivid articulations of the Paschal Journey (Death-cum-Resurrection) that we humans have seen in a long time. Strangely, while some are curious to know what the Bible has to say about suffering because of natural causes, or how God relates to the non-Jewish world who are not part of the Mosaic covenant, some others are convinced that Christians will be immune to the virus, if they have strong faith, while a few are worried about what God expects of Christians in the midst of the pandemic. Some Christians seem to be caught in a dilemma with regard to laws forbidding public worship at churches, while supermarkets are open. Should they obey God or man? Some are even losing their faith, asking why Christians need to suffer, if Christ has already risen; or why Christian hope is only about the hereafter or the next world, and not about this life on earth.

II. What do Theologians or Other Religions have to say?

1. God did not create malevolent viruses. Everything that exists, other than God, God did create and it was good (Gen. Ch.1).
2. Suffering from natural causes is the result of human free will. God respects human free will. We have messed up the world and are ultimately responsible and ought to take some responsibility to fix it.
3. Human beings have been upsetting nature for a very long time. Faith needs to be used, not abused as the completed redemption has not yet taken place. It is a process, we are all involved in. For Homo sapiens, this is undoubtedly a Calvary moment which could suggest an ensuing Resurrection. Kick backs like Covid-19 from our suffering tortured Earth, are referred to by some, as our Crucifixion today.
4. According to Indian Perspectives there are a lot of similarities e.g. *Sambhavami yuge yuge* of the Vaishnava tradition (God takes birth again and again to help his creatures); or creation as the Dance of Lord Shiva. The dance was begun by God, is continued by God and will be ended by God.
5. *Bismillah Ur Rahman Ur Rahim*-Divinity with the womb of a mother is how the Muslims understand the Divine.
6. *Wahe Guru* for the Sikhs; cares like a mother.
7. The Buddhists have a great tradition of caring for the Earth. They plant trees, care for animals etc.

III. What does the Scientific Community think?

1. One response is that it is a Zoonotic spillover because of human interference like hunting, deforestation etc. As such, the pathogens from mammals or animals, gets more readily transmitted to other creatures, including humans.
2. All life flourishes upon the ecological equilibrium. Humans themselves need to learn to protect all life-forms within their authentic ecological niches as wholesome living for humans, animals and plants depend upon it.
3. As soon as severe restrictions for travel were put in place, within a few weeks, the smog lifted, people could see the blue sky again, and birds returned to favored habitats, fish to old streams, and earth began to reclaim its innate organicity!
4. According to the Gaia hypothesis of the 1970's the earth's surface is alive. Sometimes the feedbacks are negative, keeping conditions to stabilize, and sometimes they are positive, accelerating change.
5. About 66 million years ago, the extinction of the dinosaurs and 70 % of all plants and animals living at that time was caused by an asteroid that struck off the coast of the Yucatan peninsula. The dinosaurs had become a powerful species, trampling over several other life-forms.
6. Ours is a planet where creatures live off each other. We live within a paradoxical creation e.g. the lion kills for need, but not for greed as we humans do. We humans are unique in the reckless killing of planetary life.

IV. Wisdom from Cultural Historians:

1. They remind us of Chronos (Time) and Kairos (Qualitative Time) or the Goldilocks Moments in the history of the Planet, moments when the atmosphere is charged with a new set of energies, that creates something new e.g. Noah and the Ark in the Bible.
2. They talk about 8 such thresholds on various occasions, when Goldilocks conditions took place which brought in changes e.g. The Earth and the Solar system was born at the 4th level or threshold. Human beings arrived at the 6th threshold.
3. We are living in threshold 8- The Modern Revolution of Energy, Innovation and global trade. Perhaps Covid-19 could be the ripe time of Kairos for another Goldilocks Moment to take place.

V. What do Cosmologists and Eco-Spiritualists have to offer?

1. They are happy and say that Covid-19 is a blessing in disguise. Planet Earth is healing and so are all her creatures. The closure has reduced pollution.
2. From Homo sapiens, today we have become Homo *Zoomis* because for the first time in our human history suddenly ordinary people are connected across the globe in a visual way which never happened earlier.

3. We are Earthlings, born of the earth. We did not come into the world, but came out of it.

4. People of the New Cosmology like Fr Teilhard de Chardin, Fr Thomas Berry, Fr Thomas Merton, Brian Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Sr Miriam MacGillis, Sr Ilia Delio, Fr Diarmuid O’Murchu and others say that there are three scriptures; those of Science, Religion and Cultural History, which includes the wisdom of indigenous peoples and the wisdom of women.

5. Teilhard looked forward to the convergence of the Cosmic Christ and Omega, while Berry invented the term-The Ecozoic Era- A time when the world will be guided by mutually enhanced relationships.

VI. Conclusion: Let us stop thinking about how to live and begin to live. We need to redefine Providence in a broader way now during the pandemic. The difference is how to understand that God has the capacity to destroy as well as to create. Covid-19 is a period of uncertainty. It looks like major changes are taking place. Life is no more going to be the same. It will be a new normal. Thomas Merton suggests-*You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.* Pope Francis repeatedly tells us that we have the capacity to rebuild the earth. Let us journey for all of us, to work towards a *New Heaven and a New Earth* (Isaiah 65:17).

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS/ACTIONS/ACTIVITIES:

1. Covid-19 is here and great destruction is taking place. What can we do, when we are going through this period of uncertainty? Is the time ripe for Kairos? To build the Ark like Noah?
2. All of us are inspired from within, just as Noah was. He acted upon his inspirations and built the Ark. Can you share some of your actions, innovative ideas etc. as a result of your inspirations during this pandemic/lockdown?
3. Thomas Berry is of the opinion that *the earth nourishes those who care for the whole.* This Covid-19 is a transitory phase. Keeping our common future in mind, can we plan about caring for the whole? What is the Divine within, inviting you to?

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