



D iary
of a Pandemic

Various Authors



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DIARY OF A PANDEMIC

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You can find these articles and all the others that have been published in our blog found under the tab of "Reflections and articles dealing with the COVID-19 crisis" (<https://blog.cristianismeijusticia.net/tag/coronavirus>). Unfortunately, since the crisis has not only not come to an end but instead is ongoing, you will continue to find at that site the reflections of the members of our team at Cristianisme i Justícia.

PROLOGUE

The health and social crisis brought on by COVID-19 has forced us to remain alert and to pay attention to several questions related to the social reality which, in spite of their not being anything new, have been exacerbated and made more visible during the first half of 2020.

A good many of the articles published in the *Cristianisme i Justícia* blog in these last months necessarily touch on the great questions and problems which the pandemic has brought to the forum of public and private debate in a violent way. They require all of our attention because they have cut out the roots of our frenetic, compulsive and disoriented life and, in turn, have called into question the hegemonic system of production and reproduction.

The following articles which we have gathered together do not offer a magical formula to get out of the health, social, cultural and economic crisis in which we are living. But they do orient us in a direction which has as its starting point an assumption of vulnerability, uncertainty and interdependence as the backbone of any political proposal and of discernment as the method and road to be able to suggest any alternative. All this is only possible if we place our stress and attention on those groups which are under appreciated and made vulnerable by a neoliberal, patriarchal and neocolonial system. And if we make our own that historic claim of ecofeminism: it is an absolute necessity to place life at the center of everything, both in thought and in political action.

In this compilation of articles we once again denounce the existence of the Centers for the Internment of Foreigners, which have the intention to reopen with greater force than before the pandemic, and the situation of homeless persons, the abandonment and forgetting of the elderly and the migrants in an irregular administrative situation, obliged to live faced with the racist and unjust requirements of the Law of Foreign Nationality. But at the same time, they speak of a Church that prioritizes community over sacramentalism and clericalism and of a societal goal where the words service, love and gift take on the fullness of their meaning.

The “new normal” with its masks and social distancing seems dystopic. If we have the ability to ask ourselves the right questions and make an analysis of a deeper reality that goes beyond the limits of writing and thought, we will be establishing the basis not for the old normal, but of an existence that is more livable and just for everyone.

Sonia Herrera and Pau Cuadern

CORONAVIRUS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO SECULARIZE LENT

March 17, 2020 by Xavier Casanovas¹

1. Director of Cristianisme i Justícia. Bachelor degree in mathematics. Master's degree in business administration.

For some time now I have been trying to give a rationale for the need to secularize Lent. For reasons that are self-evident, our Western societies have been taking each of the religious celebrations and adapting them to the secular calendar. Christmas has become the adoration of the god of consumption. Easter is a surrender to the sin of gluttony. The great feast days, historically consecrated to the pious devotion to the patron saints of individual towns, have been converted into endless revelry. And in some cases we can still say that the true meaning has not been completely lost.

That being said, it is clear that a capitalist society like ours will bestow a new meaning only on those things which can benefit it (such as a holiday, excess or growth) and will reject and reduce to insignificance everything that might question its values. Let's not deceive ourselves. Lent is neither sexy nor will it earn money for anyone. Even so, it could be converted into a powerful weapon for combat.

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As we are often reminded by contemporary prophets like Jorge Riechmann, we will experience a downsizing, whether voluntarily or by having it forced on us. Given the choice, and for the good of those who always end up paying the price for the mistakes of others, it is better that it be something positive. But it is here that the great question arises: what motivating factor could accompany the necessary transition to a lifestyle that is slower and not compulsive? What force of will would be capable of negating a desire for more, to have more, to run more, and not be perceived as an extravagance? What ascetical motivation would not be lived out as a limitation imposed on an insatiable desire? In secularized societies, in which Lent, which is not more or less than the preparation of the body and soul to make us conscious of what a more authentic life is, has fewer and fewer followers, can we find a secular version that would lead us to life choices that are not self-destructive, even though it might be for only a small part of the year?

Well, since it seems that this reflection is arriving late or that no one has wanted to hear it before, what we could have done voluntarily is now being forced upon us. The situation which has been created by the coronavirus is a paradigmatic example. Governments are obliged to take drastic measures

of confinement. I would like to think that this is being done out of necessity although there are those who legitimately speculate about the shock value or that this is the new normal. An interruption of work and scholastic routines, cancelation of flights and trips, and as a consequence an economy in free fall, productivity stalled – isn't this exactly what an inevitable Lent would look like?

Now that we have been obliged to do it, let's make a virtue out of necessity. Let us think about in what ways we can live with less, search for silence and pause our lives. Let's desire to see how downsizing, with its consequent positive impact on the environment, could be another valid option for living and probably the only one that is possible. Remembering the sort of apprenticeship that this coronavirus crisis will have signified, and which will have ended sooner or later, beginning next year we should be able to recognize that for a few weeks we opened our eyes and it became clear that our horizon is finite, that we are not a virtual reality but physical beings that suffer and experience fatigue. We will have to recall it because we will have forgotten and without remembrance, progress is not more than the trash that we leave behind. There is no future without a present which is aware of its limitations. The worst of the temptations that we have as human beings are the excessiveness and illusion that we are totally in control of everything. Let's remember that we are dust and unto dust we will return.

If the Christian Lent culminates in the joy of Easter, this secular and forced Lent will take us clearly to the enjoyment of a solitary and austere life, respectful of nature, a life which is humble and sober and which is both the condition which makes possible and which guarantees a full life.

CULTURAL ORGY

March 30, 2020, by Jorge Picó²

2. Bachelor's degree in English language from the University of Valencia. Diploma in Dramatic Arts from ESAD in Valencia and l'Ecole Internationale Jacques Lecoq in Paris. He is the director, author and actor in his company Ring de Teatro.

The first days of the confinement decreed by the Government of Spain had hardly begun when all of us were launched into an orgy of cultural consumption on our various digital networks: guided visits to museums, access to movie libraries, artists giving concerts from their homes, recommendations and lists of cultural items to consume and digital platforms opening their contents. All as if there were no possible way to stop. Hold back? Unthinkable. “The show must go on” was the maxim used by some prestigious theaters and operas. *#stayathome* produces vertigo in the plethora of us artists who form our own brand. We have to give in to the tyranny of visibility. I log in and I recite a poem for you or I read to you a passage from my favorite book. Waiting, for example, until the RNE (Spanish National Network) moves a finger to hire a few actors and actresses to broadcast theater? No way.

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I am taking a step forward beforehand. The artistic endeavor, which consists above all in teamwork and is meant for a live audience, is produced on the social networks where we are hypermotivated yet docile, without realizing it, and without evaluating how this forced halt in our activity echoes in us. I am both the subject and the creator, the artist and impresario, the heroic subject of the social networks. Our vocation is all of these things and we have to maintain the illusion that we are always active even though it is at the price of giving everything away for free. You see me and therefore I exist and my vertigo is lessened. You continue to see me and so I remain in the market and I am able to continue competing. Precariousness, anxiety, contingency. I am writing this in these days when I am taking time off from work contracts and interrupting essays, handing out a pittance in salaries that do not reflect the real hours of work that there are in an artistic creation. However, we are able to disguise this precariousness as something glamorous. We even feel the comfort given by the ultraconservatives which slaps us in the face: “a farmer or a cattle rancher is more useful than you” and if all the theaters, lecture halls and cultural centers were to close, it makes no difference. Now you see fulfilled the prophecy of Peter Brook.

Well, orgy, yes, but with a VIP pass. Those people who are in refugee shelters are now doing push-ups to maintain themselves in shape in their tiny rooms in shared apartments, entertaining themselves on the screens of their mobile phones and being careful not to consume too much data. There are also

mothers (and some fathers) who are spending all their time in the house with their children, doing more laundry than ever, cooking more than ever, or they change diapers or breast feed, they take care of their parents, checking online the things that they should take care of. I don't know if they have enough time or strength to take a virtual stroll through a museum or delight in an opera at the Met. I am thinking a lot about those children for whom public education, with a failure rate of 25 %, is the only opportunity to get out of isolation. This work stoppage prejudices them even more. Women who are in the sex trade and who are beginning programs sponsored by Caritas to change their lives no longer go out to work in the street. They are left without income and they need videos, yes, but personalized ones which serve to comfort them, animate them, accompany them and to touch their hearts. Or those people who are homeless with their plastic bottles cut in half with a knife but which are empty because there is neither hard money nor small change that is found in the street these days. Beauty can wait. Culture, snared in the web of the market, at this time less than ever finds those who are weak. The winners, as always, are those of us who either from the cradle, or because our parents took us up on the social elevator of culture have been able to build for ourselves a spiritual silo in the form of a library, movies and cultural inputs so that our children will inherit it and which now helps us to confront the confinement with a certain amount of calm.

And what will happen afterwards when we stop counting up the dead? Will we be capable of putting our grief out on the table? I am concerned that we will continue to trim down Culture and that those who remain creating works of culture will be only those who have the luxury of doing it, those who have savings, rents or a family behind them who can guarantee loans. I fear that after the sickness there will be left a devastated cultural landscape where what will survive will be a residential neighborhood of culture which will not travel to the suburbs of injustice and pain, or that the artists will go there simply to affirm themselves, using it as creative material in the same way they would treat a catalogue of ideas. Because those in power will be right there waiting to whitewash our conflicts and trying to reestablish a harmonious image of reality through cultural production and their works. Above all, as Antonio Francisco Bohorquez, SJ, explains on his Twitter account: "In a few days we will realize that we will not be sustained by comedy, nor by live concerts, nor reality shows, nor video chats. In a few days, if we allow ourselves, we will enter into silence and we will discover who and what sustains us. Perhaps there will be surprises."

COLLAPSE

May 12, 2020, by Pablo Font³

3. Professor of Ethics, Political Philosophy and Philosophy of Law at Loyola University of Andalucía. Doctor of Laws from the University of Seville.

These days, in what I read and talk about, I find a great contrast between two extreme points of view. On the one hand are those who say that we find ourselves before “the great transformation.” On the other hand, there are those who only see an embarrassing hiatus. I find myself in the middle of the two. It goes without saying that we lack perspective and that we don’t really even know how long the crisis will last, how many people will die, what the short-term consequences will be nor how long the confinement will last. In any case, there is no doubt that we are dealing with more than a mere incident in our lives or in the history of humanity. It is also not probable that things will take a 180 degree turn in a few months. The resistance of human subsystems and the slowness of changes to global vision will be an impediment. What does seem to be clear is that the greater the gravity of the crisis (in social, human, temporal and economic terms), the greater will be the impact of the changes. Given that it seems that Governments are not really saying how grave the situation really is, it also seems that the consequences will be greater than what would appear from their declarations.

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Ideas are crowded together in my mind, but the first word that occurs to me is “collapse”.

The concept is not new, and it is a theme that a large part of our scientific community has been working with for some time. In particular, in the fields of social ecology, ecological economy and political ecology it is a possible variable. And a large part of the scientific community in areas tied in with the study of the environmental crisis recognize it as probable. In particular, this is true with respect to the climate emergency, but also with regard to the energy crisis which would be brought on by efforts to deal with that of the climate, except for the vain hopes of nuclear energy. These studies analyze how all human subsystems could collapse, and therefore civilization as we know it (Western and globalized), if all of the data that they confirm in the area of the environment were to become facts.

It is obvious that in these days the system has collapsed. It began with the supply chain for sanitary equipment and the public health systems in the most affected areas, spreading from there to the industrial supply chain until it has reached the recent paralysis in all the areas of non-essential production. There have even been social problems and problems of citizen safety that began in

some areas with social protests (for example, the looting of supermarkets in the south of Italy). But the collapse does not affect only the real economy (another day we will talk about the financial sector), but also other areas, such as that which in a certain way (despite the superhuman effort on the part of the teachers) the educational system is suffering, the psychological well-being of health workers, and the problems of that type among certain at-risk populations or among the care givers for groups of vulnerable people. This is not to mention the mental situation that a large part of the population can suffer when from one day to the next they are confined to their homes without any previous preparation (and which are explained by some – although not all – of the unfounded breaches of trust that we all rush to condemn). These are circumstances that can get worse when the emergency measures are lengthened, as it seems is happening. It is more difficult to fit these measures into Western society which is less accustomed than oriental society to the subjection of personal good to that of the collective.

It is true that for the moment it doesn't appear that a complete economic or social collapse has been produced and, also for the moment, there has not been one on the political plane (at least in Europe, but there are on-going attempts at the evolution of negotiations in the EU) nor in the sectors of security or energy (the three key areas).

So, this is not a situation of a complete blockage, but it is, if you prefer, a “simulated collapse”, or at least one that is controlled (let's hope, because if not, we should start to tremble). But when a short circuit happens in a place which is used for large events, it is the best opportunity to check out not only the electric wiring but also all of the systems and means of security. No? Well, then, we are faced with a lamentable situation but one which offers us a paradigmatic framework to study how we can avoid a complete collapse of civilization, or at least how to temper it.

In this respect, if you compare this situation with the studies of possible socio-environmental collapses analyzed by the scientific community, several parallels are evident. In the first place, the unforeseeable nature of the situation in many cases is the product of its coming about through a chain of small events which are linked but which are interpreted inadequately. In that way we are constantly waiting for a quick tsunami that never comes or, at least, when it comes it knocks us over with water up to our necks. All of the studies point to the fact that, at least for now, there will not take place an apocalyptic environmental situation which, like a perfect Armageddon, would make impossible the reaction to a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions which would happen without a previous warning. Rather, we are talking about a permanent succession of microcrises of ever greater proportions. Like a kind of progressive and continuous increase in waves on the ocean, with some peaks during

which there can be some gusty storms. When they are gone it is only to give way to new and stronger storms. Does that sound familiar?

The second area in which it is possible to find some parallels is the lack of preparation which is brought on either by the denial of the facts or by confidence in the possibilities of human beings. This is something which is typically modern in the sense that it belongs to the cosmology which has arisen in the Modern Age which believes in the continued progress of human beings who are masters of their own destiny. "We will come out of this, just as we always have come out." Obviously, we have here a negation of reality, something about which we hope to write in the next chapter.

The third place where we can observe similarities between this practice drill for sinking and the studies about a possible socio-environmental collapse is in the inequality in which the consequences of this one are received. Since the beginning of this crisis, I have intended to write some urgent reflections, but being the father of two small children makes it very difficult. Although by looking around at others, I obviously can't complain. The unequal impact of the crisis can be seen in how it affected certain workers, at least until the prohibition of nonessential activities: those workers who could not telework, those that suffer from ERTES, those who had been previously unemployed, and vulnerable groups like infants, workers in stores, the elderly with or without dementia, persons with handicaps or different capacities, and those with behavioral problems. Clearly, health care workers and members of emergency services are in the front line of fire, but there is a lot that can be said about the stability and social and working conditions of these groups. Others risking their necks are those people who not only are not prepared by their vocation to fight in this war, but also do not enjoy steady employment or good working conditions.

There is no doubt that it is not the same thing to spend the time of crisis with telework in a large house and without financial concerns than as a caretaker for dependent persons in microscopic apartments in marginal neighborhoods, surrounded by large families with all of their members being unemployed, vulnerable and perhaps with other socio-familial problems (Save the Children will soon be publishing some data about this). Nevertheless, confinement has been ordered for everyone equally. Equality of methods once again overcomes for us the inequality of the conditions of each person or social sector. This takes us back to times past, but it is clearly the situation which could be pictured in a possible future scenario of blockage in which the privileged classes would not suffer in the same way the effects of the environmental crisis. Even now the weakest groups in the poorer countries are suffering them. That inequality, which seems now at its greatest point, evidently has certain limits. Faced with a scenario of a total collapse that affects all the human subsystems and which

is global (in terms of its spread to the whole planet), there is no defense, not even on the part of the powerful. We have been able to discern this today in the death of people who are famous and powerful in socioeconomic terms.

This rehearsal for a collapse has slapped us in the face but it is only a small sample of something that could be much worse. Perhaps it is a warning of something that perhaps could manifest itself, as has already been noted, in the form of new partial crises. The question is: after we have overcome this crisis, will we finally be conscious that a much graver collapse is immanent if we return to the path taken previously?

PLANET “CARING”

May 12, 2020, by José Laguna⁴

4. Theologian, musician and teacher. Member of the area of Theology of Cristianisme i Justícia.

If an extraterrestrial were to appear today on Earth, it would inform its alien confreres of the existence of a strange race of beings who are obsessed about caring for its most fragile members. It would also communicate that on that diminutive blue planet which travels at full speed through the Milky Way it had detected frenetic activity around hospitals, homes for the elderly and supermarkets. It is a Planet of very peculiar beings who cover their faces with small masks and who, at the cyclical call of a satellite called the Moon, come out to their windows and balconies in order to applaud the work of those who care for others, an especially valued tribe judging by the amount of work they do and the unanimous recognition given to them by the rest. On the other hand, it might also happen that the Martian informant might write a dossier about a distant star in which a captive race was waging a battle without mercy against an invisible enemy. This would be a planet of peculiar beings, who at the cyclical call of a satellite called the Moon go to their windows and balconies to ward off fear and instill courage in one another.

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Perhaps in order to explain what is happening to us today there is no other way except by mixing the two narratives: that of caring with that of fear, the one of solidarity with the one of defensiveness. However, in order to build the future, we have no choice but to choose one of them. What kind of society would we like to build when we get out of this emergency situation, a planet of people who are cared for or a defensive planet? What exceptional (in the sense of excellent) decisions will we stay with after this exceptional situation? Will we decide that caring for the most vulnerable will always be the cornerstone on which we will construct the model for our civilization? When our alien neighbors finally decide to pay us a visit, will they be met with the affectionate welcome of a caring planet or with the immunological borders of a defensive planet?

In the 16th Century Copernicus taught us that the Earth was not the center of the known universe. That privilege belonged to the star called the Sun. In the 21st Century a lethal virus has forced us to shift our social center of gravity. Health care, education, housing, work, human rights, leisure, planets that until barely a few days ago were orbiting under the gravitational pull of the star Economy, are now circling around the planet of “Caring”.

Whenever we have the time to mourn and cry for the death of all those who have now traveled to other distant stars without our being able to embrace them, that will be the moment to decide if, as a society, we will continue supporting a new cosmic order that circles around the most fragile or if we will return to a fratricidal “econo-centrism” in a disordered galaxy. From the heavens there are a lot of stars that observe us with high hopes.

NANI VALL-LLOSERA: "ONLY A PUBLIC AND TRULY UNIVERSAL HEALTH SYSTEM CAN RESPOND TO A SITUATION LIKE THIS."

April 9, 2020, by Cristianisme i Justícia

Interview with Nani Vall-Llosera, primary care physician at the Bon Pastor Hospital in Barcelona. She is a member of the social area of Cristianisme i Justícia and president of the Catalan Forum of Primary Care Physicians.

Tell us what life has been like since the appearance of the coronavirus in health care centers and what has been the reaction in Primary Care.

17 At the beginning of March, we supposed that cases of the flu would have been getting fewer for some time, but we continued to see cases. Toward the week of the 9th we began to see a lot of respiratory infections, many people with coughs, a slight fever and colds. At that time the criterion was that we considered as cases of coronavirus only those where someone had been in direct contact with an infected person or who had come from one of certain zones in Italy. We saw many patients with the symptoms, but the majority of the people did not fulfill any of the criteria. In that same week, Madrid was already in the news and we suspected that we were missing something. But also at that time, Primary Care was not considered to be a protagonist in the drama. The cases and questions were resolved in the hospitals and telephone hotlines. These quickly collapsed and the hospitals, who initially were only admitting less serious cases, also were overwhelmed. In a very short time, we accomplished a turning of all the activity of the hospitals toward giving attention to the coronavirus. All visits were stopped as well as all in-person appointments of all the specializations with very few exceptions such as oncology and maternity care. But many people with other pathologies have had their follow-up visits to the hospital postponed. This has led to people having to make do at home, but little by little we are seeing patients who have decompensated and need attention by health workers. For them the only help available is in Primary Care.

In what way has your daily work changed? What are you doing now that you were not doing before?

In Primary Care we also have turned things around and in a couple of weeks the kind of care has changed very much. Conscious of the fact that health care centers are places for transmission of coronavirus, we are doing almost no in-person visits. From the outset, for anyone who wants to consult, we tell them to call on the phone. The majority of cases can be resolved telephonically. Only in a few cases do we make them come to the office in order to diagnose them. If they present symptoms of coronavirus, we see them in a restricted area. If they don't, they go to an area of the office where no coronavirus patients are seen and which is considered clean. We are trying to reach all the population to which we usually attend, calling everyone to find out how they are, giving support during the quarantine, and calling all of those over 65 for whom the confinement is especially difficult. The entire community network in the neighborhoods is intact, but their activity has been stopped. Homes for the elderly, civic centers, libraries are all doing activities by telephone. But for many people this is their only relationship. There are many people who are alone.

What role is Primary Health Care playing in the coronavirus epidemic? What tensions have you found between Hospital Care and Primary Care? What does that mean for the people?

The thing is that there has not been any strategic planning that included primary care. It has always been a step behind. Primary care did not figure into either the political discussion or the discussion that took place in the media. The situation is very complicated and very difficult, and it has consequences on all the levels of the lives of the people. Because the people only saw the hospitals functioning, it has become difficult for us to explain to them that they had to stay at home and that we would give them a daily follow-up as to how their symptoms were evolving.

The majority of people present with symptoms that are not acute and that can be managed at home. Then, the test that should be made when some complication appears is an X-ray. It is a simple test but one that should not be performed in all cases because we can't overwhelm the radiological services. When in the media all the talk is only about Hospital Care, telling people that we will follow up with them and that we also can attend to them has not been easy for them to understand. To begin with, it is because we have not had the capacity to perform any diagnostic test and the thousands of clinical diagnoses that we are doing are not counted as confirmed cases. It is a situation that is

technically very complicated. However, I think that it is absolutely necessary that the primary care centers and health centers remain open, close to the people so that the people themselves can arrange for consults.

It is not only that, but we are also seeing many consequences for mental health: anxiety, fear. Many people are dying and the fact that someone dies alone in the hospital makes it difficult to begin the grieving process. It is not possible to say good-bye or to have that social encounter which is provided by being consoled for the death of a loved one. Not having this possibility leads to people going through a phase of incredulity. They don't believe that someone who two days before had been well and at their side is not there any longer, without their having seen them. It is important that we do this proactive work of accompanying people, of diagnosing the cases that are not acute, of following up with them. A nurse realized that one of my patients for whom we were doing follow-up had not responded to our calls for several days. The on-call physician went to their residence and found that the patient and her husband were at the point of asphyxiation. Ours are small stories, of people who are probably not important and we will never know if they were positive or not because they were not hospitalized. But we are at their side.

Speaking about Bon Pastor, a working-class neighborhood in the city of Barcelona with a high population density, how is it suffering during the epidemic? Are the social factors determinative in this crisis?

When you look at the data on the incidence of cases that we have, you will see a great difference among neighborhoods. Evidently, this difference is not accidental. Nou Barris, Trinitat Vella ... are neighborhoods where people are forced to share living space. This makes isolation difficult when a case is detected. In the case of infection, it is recommended that the sick person have a bathroom only for himself if possible and follow some very strict methods of hygiene. But when we have families who are living in sublet apartments, it is impossible to comply with these norms. If we add to this that in these neighborhoods many people live whose jobs are considered essential services that are sustaining life these days (supermarket cashiers, household workers that care for the elderly, people with cleaning services, public transportation workers, etc.), and if they are working without adequate safety measures, then the possibilities of contagion increase. If you also take into account that poverty generates disease and that in these neighborhoods the incidents of many diseases is higher than in others, the possibility of an even graver infection exists. At some moments it has been said that the coronavirus does not differentiate between social classes. It is true that there are people from higher social classes

that are also infected. But there is always something that affects the poorest to a greater degree. This pattern is repeated in every city.

Another reality is how we are facing death in these days. Between the pragmatism of a solitary and antiseptic death in a hospital and the possibility of dying accompanied by a family farewell, which do we have to accept? How should we be dealing with this question?

This is a topic which we have not figured out as a society. We don't talk much about death and we speak very little about how we would like it to be. We don't really speak with the family and with the elderly who are near death about what should be the end point of medical treatment or what is a good time to refrain from doing other things or medical interventions. All of this is seldom discussed as a society and in that sense this crisis has caught us without having done our homework. Elderly people have thought about it more but perhaps have not verbalized it. That leads at times to the case of someone who is seriously ill being taken to the hospital when they are near the end of life and the possibilities of accompanying the person there are zero. From the point of view of health care, there should be an attempt to humanize a little this final moment. There should be a way that the person could be accompanied by a family member who is adequately protected. Not everywhere is this happening and so it is not an absolute criterion that the person has to die alone. It is not that we in primary care are in a different situation, but since we know the patients it is easier for us to suggest that the end is near and that the possibility exists that the end can come in one's own home.

It has now been four weeks that we have had the state of alarm with the most drastic methods already activated. Would you say that the reaction has been correct and that this crisis is being met in the best way possible?

I would not like to be in the skin of someone making decisions at this time. This is a very complicated situation, but we have certainly come to it late. All of us are in the same boat and of course many things have failed. There was a failure of planning and a failure in day to day operations and the ability to make quick decisions to protect health workers or residences for the elderly. It is very easy to say in hindsight what should have been done, but this is the moment for us to continue doing our work, of continuing to point out those things that are not functioning well and which we think could be done better. And being at the side of the people. Being critical only when criticism can help to make things better.

On the other hand, there is the reality of the residences. Some years ago they were administered by primary care, even though in a precarious way since there was never money to do it properly. But now they have gone to private providers. The residences are doing what they can to attempt to confront the situation, but they are doing it without having sufficient material, with professionals who are getting sick, without the ability to diagnose or differentiate those who are positive from the ones who are negative and therefore without the ability to separate them. So, we are attending the tragedy that we see these days.

Maybe there is a criticism that can be made. That would be for the cuts and lack of investment in health care that has been denounced for many years. What impact does the years of disinvestment have in moments like this?

It is clear that all of this has occurred in a weakened health care system and that Catalonia and Madrid are among the regions where the investment in health care per person is lowest and which have declined most in the last few years. The crisis has taken hold of us after many cuts in personnel, one of the key factors that has been lacking in these days. It is also true that control over the residences has been scarce and the ratio of professionals per resident very high. This has happened in a bad moment for the health care services, both in hospitals and in primary care.

What can we learn from this crisis with respect to our health care system? Or about our society? Do you think that there are some evident first learning experiences?

Fundamentally, public health is a treasure that we should care for. Any person who fails to pay taxes, either by fraud or by tax evasion, should receive social reprobation. Preventive medicine and public health, which as specializations that have received cuts during the crisis because they were thought to be unnecessary, have been revealed as important, and even more so when you take into account that this kind of situation can be repeated in the future. Only by taking a global view and by using technical knowledge can an epidemic be controlled. It has also become clear that it is fundamental that public health care be truly universal, above all as a question of justice and human rights, but also because it has been shown in this pandemic that everyone's health is inter-related. I think that all of these lessons will be learned. No one can confront a similar situation as an individual nor is there a private health care system that can respond to a situation like this one.

Culturally, I think that from the point of view of values and the neoliberal culture in which we are all immersed, there are many things which this virus calls into question and from which we should try to learn. The post-COVID-19 era will be very important in order to see toward what society we are moving. Will it be one of “Those who can, save yourselves” or one in which we try to respond communally, cooperating and becoming conscious of our vulnerability and interdependence and acting on that? If we want to turn our back on this essential factor of human life, I think we will be making a big mistake. All of this will come later, but anyone who can make this type of reflection now, it is important that they do so.

THE FACES OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM

April 21, 2020, by Lluís S. Salinas⁵

5. Jesuit. He is finishing his studies at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. He studied Environmental Science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He currently is part of the Committee of Conscientization about Climate Change of his department.

The debate about anthropocentrism seems to be interesting and pertinent in this time in which we are living. Anthropocentrism is the philosophical theory that places human beings at the center of the universe, considering them as the measure and criteria for all reasoning. On the one hand, this line of thinking is extensive among all social classes, among all ideologies, among all beliefs. Apparently, it would have meaning in the supposed context of the “struggle of the species” for survival. On the other hand, anthropocentrism is diametrically opposed to what is implied by “care for the common home” and to what Pope Francis proposes in the encyclical *Laudato si'*, where it does not allow expressions such as “everything is connected”.

The fact is that it is part of anthropocentrism to conceive of reality as a duality: on one side is what is human, and on the other, everything else. For this reason, this philosophical current would not affirm the intrinsic value of any living thing. Nevertheless, it is easy to fall into the mistake of converting reality into a mosaic of black and white, ones and zeros, the good and the bad. It would seem that everything “ecological” is good and is distanced from anthropocentrism, but a prior reflection is necessary. I say this with a desire to avoid polarization and to favor reasoning. Thinking can never be something limited by stereotypes or preestablished ideas. So, I would like to propose here some sentences and to play with them. The sentences are three affirmations that can be heard on the street, on panel discussions on the radio or on television reports. About each of the sentences I will suggest questions, with a brief reflection at the end.

The first sentence is the following: “Human beings should dominate creation because they are at the apex of evolution.” Perhaps there are those who think that in the ecosystems in which we live, we human beings should behave as what we are, living beings, and assure our survival (following one of the interpretations of the theory of evolution of species of Charles Darwin). Notwithstanding, is it necessary to dominate other species in order to survive? What does it mean “to be at the apex of evolution”? Haven't all species been constantly evolving up to our time? And most importantly, in addition to natural evolution, which other evolutions should be taken into account in human beings? The social one? The cultural one? The idea of domination is very rooted in our culture, in our belief system. Nevertheless, domination places us outside of what we dominate and returns us to the duality.

Another sentence that we could hear is: “Everyone should adhere to veganism because consuming animals or animal products is an assault against the rights of animals.” Certainly, this phrase has become well known in many circles. And almost automatically the next question is “Do animals have rights?” But you could also ask: Doesn’t granting rights to other species imply an air of superiority on the part of human beings (since the only one who can grant rights is the one with the power to give them)? Or even: “Who decides what is good or useful for animals?”

But we can go even further and ask ourselves why some living things can have rights and others not. What differentiates the parts of an ecosystem (riverbeds, vegetables, diverse chemical substances, animals, microorganisms, geological elements, etc.) so that only we animals are worthy of certain rights? Is it because we have a nervous system? Isn’t that utilitarian? Finally, we could ask ourselves about the functioning of the ecosystems. What should we do with predatory animals that don’t respect the rights of other animals (because they live by eating herbivores, for example)?

With these questions I don’t want to place in doubt the option of those persons who prefer not to consume products that come from animals. Nor do I wish to invite the thought that industrialized production of food in our societies is not breaking down a great number of ecosystems. I am only looking for signs of anthropocentrism and inviting reflection about our relationship with everything that surrounds us.

Finally, the last sentence that I want to present is the following: “We should take action against the virus that is causing this pandemic and eradicate it.” In a situation like the one in which we find ourselves, it is not difficult to hear phrases like this. But would this phrase go against respect for creation? Why can you attack a virus and not an aggressive animal companion? Against what can we fight and what not? What happens if the virus is necessary for the existence of life on Earth, in order for species to evolve, to control population? Of course, I am not suggesting that any research about a vaccine should be stopped. Rather, I am inclined toward the opposite. Ecosystems have determined ways of functioning and we human beings, as a part of them, ought to learn to survive in them by using our abilities so that we can find a balance in our relationship with everything that surrounds us.

We are engrossed in a passionate journey which is that of reflecting about ourselves, about “nature”. Often, we are taken by pride and the illusion of believing that we know the place that we occupy or ought to occupy, but the ecosystems of which we form a part are very much more complex. Perhaps this time when everything seems to have stopped a little can help us to keep silent and let creation speak. Maybe we can take advantage of it to learn how it is (that is, how we are) in order to live as if we formed a part of creation, because we are part of it, and as if we were connected, because everything is connected.

LIFE IS REALLY SERIOUS

April 27, 2020, by Núria Romay⁶

6. Graduate in Primary Education. She has worked as a teacher at Jesuitas-Bellvitge and linked to the world of informal education. She is currently studying Psychology and is being formed in accompaniment of persons who are in vulnerable situations.

Life is really serious. However old you might be. “It’s really serious”, you say to yourself this morning. The news of the death of a young friend grounds you in the present, as if it hadn’t been clear to you before. This jolt brings you back to reality and leads to the reappearance of an old mantra, that you know well, that is not new to you. “Life is really serious.”

That time is now far in the past when what made you anxious was choosing a group, selecting the right words for a tweet, getting to an appointment on time, deciding with whom you wanted to spend the second half of August or how you would manage the teaching of reading and writing to your students. Now, all of this seems to you to be the blurred road of someone who then had not experienced the bitter hangover left behind by pain, the time past in which sickness had not entered your home, and being close to fragility, you thought, was not within your reach. Today, without knowing how, you find yourself befriending those who pray for family members in the hospital and acquaintances who die before their time.

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It produces vertigo, right? That your preferences today speak in some other language and they push you to the point that you realize that life –marvel and mystery at the same time – is really serious. Then, it is when you have the feeling that you coexist going between two options (and you don’t forget that , in spite of everything, you continue to be one of the privileged persons who has options) as if you were trying to balance those things that are, on the one hand, and on the other those things that don’t turn out the way you want. Option A: where nothing is worth it, where you are constantly asking yourself the reason for so much human suffering and for the absence of those who are no longer, and you drown and you give up and you pass by everything. Option B: you reflect on finiteness, on wounds, on vulnerability and you grab it all with both hands because it is what drives justice and responsiveness, every morning when you want to live the day to the fullest.

Today, in light of this mantra which is as insistent as a woodworm (Life is really serious), you look for an answer within those four words. The four actions that just a few weeks ago you had underscored in the CiJ blog speaking about a Dignified Death. What irony! To be thankful. To forgive. To say that I love you. To say good-bye. And now that everything is reeling, what if it is all about that? If it is about never (never) confining ourselves to these four ac-

tions? And if it were about taking off all that protective equipment which had isolated your heart?

To be thankful. To forgive. To say I love you. To say good-bye. Think about Jesus of Nazareth. He did not save his love, nor his pain. All that duality becomes clear to you in His life during those days in which you want to accompany Him on the road of His Passion, His Death and His Resurrection. It is clear that Jesus knew well what it was to feel himself consoled and overwhelmed at the same time. His life was really serious. And perhaps now, when you don't find anywhere an explanation for the death and desperation of so many men and women, it has become urgent that you live each one of your days, being grateful like Jesus, forgiving like Jesus, loving like Jesus and , when necessary, saying good-bye like Jesus, who knew on whom he was relying.

PANDEMIC FROM HELL

April 29, 2020, by Ruth Galve⁷

The pandemic of Coronavirus SARS-COV-2, more than other crises, reveals our weaknesses, both of individuals and of society. Crises underscore the situation, already fragile in itself, of the most vulnerable. We say vulnerable, but many are invalids, that is to say, that they cannot take care of themselves without the help of others. Of all the problems of the society in which we live, we can call attention to three because of the number of people affected and their trans-universality: childhood poverty, violence based on gender and the helplessness of the elderly. Of these three, I am discussing the last one in the first place because it is usually the one that is mentioned least.

Unfortunately, the large number of victims of advanced age and the situations that have been produced in some residences have converted this group into involuntary protagonists of the tragedy. This has generated also controversies about the use of triage in the hospitals, the situation in the residential centers, or, in the worst cases, it has shown on social networks and in political discourses the explicit disregard for the lives of the elderly.⁸ In second place, because it is the most desperate situation. The victims of poverty and of gender-based violence have hope, while the very elderly people are in the waiting area; what they can wait for does not give them hope.

In whatever moment in life we find ourselves, our options remain conditioned by our health and socioeconomic situation. Among the elderly, health is often failing and low or even nonexistent income (especially for women) is habitual. The apartments in which we live, the kind of work that we do, the culture of self-care and the cult of youth and infancy leave little room for the elderly. While they are autonomous, they have the capacity to help (let's remember the role played by their pensions, as insufficient as they might be, in the times of crisis and the so-called syndrome of the grandmother slave), but later, what happens? The number of elderly people over 65 that live alone in Catalonia was 334,000 in 2018 (Idescat). The majority, 3 out of 4, are women and 139,300 are older than 80. Almost 60,000 live in residences and more than 4000 are waiting for public housing. In this group we should call attention to persons who are dependent and incapacitated (in 2018 there were more than 260,000 people over 65 with a legally recognized incapacity), especially those affected by dementia, above all Alzheimer's. The Alzheimer's Foundation of Catalonia estimates that some 86,000 persons are affected.

7. Bachelor's degree in Catalan language studies. She is doing research into the area of oral expression and the teaching of interiority. She is working on the development of new models for learning languages.

8. Naomi Klein spoke about this on April 1, 2020 in the following statements: "People who before never watched it are now turning on their televisions and seeing the commentators of Fox News saying that perhaps they should sacrifice their grandparents so that the prices of stock can rise. And you ask, what kind of system is this?"

In the coming decades the population of Europe will become more and more elderly in numbers never known in the history of humanity. If we don't act beginning right now, with humane and humanistic intelligence, with foresight, with medium and long-range policies instead of the usual emergency ones, we will be opening up the majority of the population to a daily tragedy, pandemic or not.

Civilization is also measured by the quality of life of the most invalid. At the beginning of the human race, we know that the first hominids, in the manner of pelicans, fed on the oldest in the group, those without teeth and condemned to die if others who were younger did not chew their food for them. We have to dedicate our time in building a present that is more welcoming. Let us all give, each one of us, life to the years with a more transverse society, with love, respect and good company. We should also demand regulations, and that means setting policies and above all give them a budget that facilitates the well-being of the elderly from those generations who as children lived through the Civil War and the post-war, spent their youth under the dictatorship, who worked and took care of their families and who now have the right to our consideration and their own welfare. We have a social debt to watch over the liberty and dignity of the elderly and weak, and to assume responsibility for them both as individuals and as a group.

LOYOLA VIRUS? (ST. IGNATIUS AND COVID-19)

April 30, 2020, by J. I. González Faus⁹

9. Jesuit. Member of the Area of Theology of Cristianisme i Justícia. Author of several works, one of his most well-known being *La Humanidad Nueva* (The New Humankind), Sal Terrae, 2016.

In the April edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, in the Spanish version, an article appears that compares the coronavirus to the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. The author is not a Jesuit, but rather a former director of health programs for the W.H.O. and currently a council member for the center-south of Geneva for health policies. To talk about the Exercises in a newspaper which is both so serious and so secular can be the biggest surprise of this pandemic.

Being more specific, the author compares the COVID-19 crisis with the “first week” of the Ignatian exercises. The first week is the hardest, it leads to the sinner’s becoming conscious not only of one’s own sin, but of the evil that swarms throughout the world and through history, and in some way transcends us.

The author clarifies the point that the first week of the Exercises is not the moment for making decisions, but rather for becoming conscious of our situation. It is necessary to continue on longer in order to acquire values, ideals and models of life and then some two days of “discernment of motivations” in order to be able to make a decision, almost at the end of the Exercises.

In identifying our situation of pandemic with the first week of the Exercises, the author calls us to consciousness of the model of development which we have built. It is one in which “what is good for me is your loss”, one where “a soccer player is more relevant than a nurse and it is more important to produce armaments than to build hospitals”, and one in which “justice goes with private property at all cost” and not “a balance between human beings and available resources”.

These sinful principles are concretized afterwards here and there. “In Italy, in less than 10 years from 2010 to 2016, 70,000 hospital beds disappeared, 175 hospital entities closed, and the number of local autonomous health offices went from 642 in 1980 to 101.”

The data that is cited in the article is not unique. They are only an example. In the United Kingdom, provisions for families have been cut back by 40 %, local public spending has decreased by 32 % in the poorest areas between 2012 and 2018, but only 16 % in the wealthiest areas. Childhood poverty went from 28 % to 31 % between 2012 and 2018. In France, there are numbers that go in the same direction. In Spain we can recall the many health workers who had to emigrate because of the labor reform laws (curiously, many of them to the

UK) and the lack of whom we are feeling at the moment. In all of Europe, the economic crisis of 2008 was resolved with austerity for the poorest and benefits (or free bailouts) for the banks.

But these data, which can be multiplied, are not the most serious thing. Returning to the article that I am commenting on, it happens that in 2011 a document from W.H.O. pointed out “the constant risk that there might be produced an influenza pandemic with health, economic and social repercussions that would be highly devastating.” In a report from 2019 drawn up by the World Bank, they spoke about “the very real threat of a pandemic of a highly lethal respiratory pathogen with a rapid evolution that could destroy 5 % of the world’s population.”

It is hard to understand why our communications media (which are so sensitive to criticism) were silent about this data. Unfortunately, we can understand why our health and pharmaceutical institutions also did nothing. The reason was given by Noam Chomsky in an interview in *Il Manifesto* (from March 12, 2018): avoiding an epidemic doesn’t produce any benefit. On the other hand, when the epidemic has already broken out, preparing vaccines and medicines is a great source of profit.

These are, more or less, the data. Returning to that “first week” of the Ignatian Exercises, the question is now to recognize our sin, to feel profound repentance and to seek forgiveness through an intention to do better. As it is written in the article on which I am commenting: “The important thing is not so much that we overcome this crisis, but it is that we produce a change to make sure that things never go back to the way they were before. On the contrary, if we return to the same things that brought us a pandemic, we will continue the risk of suffering a new one.”

Very good, but ... When the crisis of 2008 broke out, President Sarkozy spoke about the necessity of “re-founding capitalism” and that “re-founding” ended up meaning “reinforcing”. Now President Macron has spoken about “questioning our model of development” and we can fear that “questioning” ends up meaning “ensuring”.

Without consciousness or repentance of sin, the best thing is to leave the Exercises behind and, as several sociologists have said, “continue dancing serenely on the deck of the Titanic”. And if later we crash into an iceberg, let us not think that that “hell” is the punishment of some supernatural Power and Judge, but rather that we have not only earned it, but we have built it little by little.

And if I can be allowed to add a comma to the author of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, St. Ignatius wants us to enter into the first week with the conviction that “we live for something” and that that goal of our lives ought to leave us “indifferent” to face everything else. Today the word “indifferent” doesn’t sound

very appropriate because it has too much of the sense of dropping out, that nothing matters to me. So, it should be pointed out that Ignatian indifference supposes a preference: that for which I live.

So then, if the goal of our lives is what is authentic, then indifference is converted into freedom, that word which is so sacred and that goal that is so much sought after. In any case, if the goal of my life is money, that will make me indifferent when facing all the sickness, hunger and misery with which I am surrounded (however, I would give as alms a tiny bit of my superfluity). But, if the goal of my life is brother and sisterhood, that will make me indifferent (stated now in Ignatian language) before “wealth or poverty, honor or dishonor ...” And there lies the truest and greatest freedom.

Here is, then, that which – I don’t know why – is called “the mother of the lamb.” Or if we prefer an expression that is even less understood, we can make use of that of the Latin poet, “Hic Rhodus, hic salta.”¹⁰

10. Literally, “Here is Rhodes, jump over here.” From Aesop’s Fables. –Ed.

THE CORONAVIRUS AND HOMELESSNESS

May 4, 2020 , by Beatriz Fernández Gensana¹¹

11. Lawyer. She has been the President of the Fundació Escó. Currently is responsible for the legal department of the Arrels Fundació which works in the protection and defense of homeless individuals.

“Living in the streets supposes a risk.” This statement is one of the first that we make when we explain what is implied by not having a home. It is a risk because many times a person on the street becomes invisible. S/he doesn’t exist. We don’t see him or her and so we don’t protect them.

Nevertheless, in these days when everyone who has a home has to be confined to it for “medical reasons”, the persons on the street become more visible than ever. We question the system that during emergency health situations like the one which we are living through, allow there to be people who can’t have available a space where they feel safe and protected.

“Living in the streets supposes a risk.” In reality, these days many people who have gone out into the street to go to work or to shop have called emergency services, worried when they see people sleeping beneath the house or on the bench in front of it. Certainly, they are people who had spent the day or the night there. But now we “see” them more and are more conscious of their vulnerability.

Because not having a home these days is a reflection of many other violations: violation of the right to health. People who live in the streets, either for reasons of age or because of additional problems have very fragile health which exposes them more to sickness; violation of the right to hygiene. In spite of the consideration that careful hygiene is a basic method of prevention, not having your own home and the fact that many of the showers and public spaces in the cities are closed, makes it impossible to exercise this right; violation of the right to food. At a minimum, having one hot meal a day is not guaranteed in this exceptional situation; violation of the right to mobility. Certainly, these days this is a right that we can only exercise with limitations. But in the case of people living in the streets, it has become impossible to limit them since their only space is public space. The consequence is often a sanction; violation of the right to rest. Infirmity, age, the tension of these days wear people out physically and mentally, but there are not any peaceful and safe spaces, “good spaces” where one can rest.

Because not having a home these days is proof of the violation of many rights:

- the right to health: people who live in the streets, either for reasons of age or because of additional problems have very fragile health which exposes them more to sickness;

- the right to hygiene: in spite of the consideration that careful hygiene is a basic method of prevention, not having your own home and the fact that many of the showers and public spaces in the cities are closed, makes it impossible to exercise this right;
- the right to food: at a minimum, having one hot meal a day is not guaranteed in this exceptional situation;
- the right to mobility: certainly, these days this is a right that we can only exercise with limitations. But in the case of people living in the streets, it has become impossible to limit them when their only space is public space. The consequence is often a sanction;
- the right to rest: infirmity, age, the tension of these days wear people out physically and mentally, but there are not any peaceful and safe spaces, “good spaces” where one can rest.

But also being homeless means more exposure to bad weather. The homeless are more visible and so they can suffer more situations of violence and abuse. According to the data of the last census done by Arrels of people living in the street, physical and/or verbal violence directed at homeless people has increased during the last year. 40 % expressed having been the victim of aggression. The number rises to 60 % in the case of those who have been living in the street for more than five years. The exceptional situation that we are living through now can give rise to situations of violence and a feeling of insecurity on the part of this group because it is a suitable moment for rants based on xenophobia and fear of the poor. Unfortunately, one sign of this violence we have seen recently when the news has informed us of the assassination of four people who were living in the streets of Barcelona.

Along with Arrels, we condemn the violence against these four homeless people who have died, in the same way that we condemn other abusive incidents and those based on fear of the poor that have been produced in these days.

We have to work to protect these people, especially in these days, but also whenever we get out of this health crisis. And we know that it is possible. These days we have seen the beginning of initiatives to reverse this situation of violation of rights. There are individuals and companies that have started initiatives to guarantee food with dignity, specific instructions to security forces not to sanction people in a situation of homelessness, and public and private establishments which offer themselves to provide housing for the homeless. There are neighbors who are organized and sensitive to the persons who live in the street and who denounce situations of abuse and violation of rights.

We don't know what will happen when this exceptional situation that we are living through is over. Some people are talking about 6, 8, 12 months before

we return to the normal life we had before. But in the case of people who are living in the street, this “normal life” should not be reproduced. We should be capable of reflecting on the fragile situation in which those who already had nothing before can find themselves.

FROM A SACRAMENTALIST CHURCH TO AN EVANGELIZING CHURCH

May 5, 2020, by Victor Codina¹²

12. Jesuit. Doctorate in Theology. From 1982 until 2018 he resided in Bolivia where he has taught as a professor of theology at the Bolivian Catholic University in Cochabamba, alternating with pastoral work in poorer neighborhoods.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been that all of the places of worship, all of the churches and temples, have shut down. Even the “Urbi et Orbi” blessings of Francis were given before a plaza and a St. Peter’s basilica that were empty. Many predicted a Lent and Holy Week that would be poor, without liturgical celebrations, without the stations of the Cross nor the steps of processions.

And yet, it has been an extraordinarily deep and rich Holy Week, not only for the participation at the ceremonies via the media, but something much more profound: living closely the passion of the Lord in the passion and suffering of the sick; reading the Gospel and praying with one’s family; experiencing the help given to the elderly living alone and the collaboration of neighbors, the applause for health and transportation workers, those who work in supermarkets and pharmacies, all of the volunteers who have distributed food, etc. The protagonists of this Holy Week have not been the priests nor even their media transmissions, but rather the families, lay men and women and the youth. It was a domestic Church which was promoted, with lay men and women as the protagonists, where the fathers and the mothers, not the parish priest, have been the ones who taught the children how to pray before going to bed at night. Where there are two or three gathered in the name of the Lord, He is in their midst.

Perhaps many might believe that this closure of the churches has been only a pastoral parenthesis and that soon the situation will return to what it was before. Others, like the sociologist and theologian Tomas Halik in Prague, clearly state that this is a time of favor and grace, a *kairos*, a sign of the times in which God wishes to reveal something to us.

What does God want to say to us? Everyone could give a personal answer, but from the point of view of the Church, perhaps we can believe that the Spirit invites us to go from a sacramentalist and clerical church to one that is evangelizing.

The sacramentalist church is identified so much with the seven sacraments that it runs the risk of considering the clergy as the protagonists of the Church and the church building as its self-referential or appropriate center. Also, it

marginalizes laypersons, fails to care for evangelization, the announcement of the Word, the initiation into the faith, prayer, Christian formation, all without forming a Christian community nor a laity of citizens responsible for and in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Many pastors are anxious when they see that the sacraments are rapidly declining and their faithful aging.

On the other hand, the evangelizing Church is the one which is doing what Jesus did: announcing the good news of the Kingdom of God, preaching, curing the sick, eating with sinners, feeding the hungry, liberating all from oppression and slavery. This was the program of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth: visiting the blind, liberating captives, evangelizing the poor, announcing the grace and mercy of God. At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, but the Gospel of John placed also at the supper the washing of feet and the new commandment of brotherly love, completing the liturgical dimension with the most existential in order to avoid the conversion of the Eucharist into merely an empty rite.

I am not talking about forgetting about the sacraments but rather of valuing them as “visible and efficacious signs of grace”, always in the light of faith and of the Word so that they are not turned into something magical and passive. For that reason, every sacramental celebration is preceded by the celebration of the Word. Vatican Council II states that the primary mission of bishops and priests consists of announcing the Word of God.

Certainly, “the Eucharist makes the Church”. Without Eucharist there is no fully constituted Church. But this phrase should be completed by its counterpart: “The Church makes the Eucharist.” It is the entire community which celebrates the Eucharist, presided over by its pastors. Without the woven cloth of an ecclesial community there would not be Eucharist.

Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, in the conclave in which he was elected as bishop of Rome, offered an original interpretation of the passage in Apoc. 3:20 in which the Lord knocks at the door so that we can open it to Him. Ordinarily, the interpretation is that the Lord wants us to open the door for Him so that He can enter our house, but Bergoglio said that what the Lord asks of us now is that we open the door for Him and we let Him go out into the street.

Therefore Francis talks about “a Church on its way outside,” toward the margins, a fieldhospital, which smells of the sheep, which finds Christ in the wounds of the people and of the Church, that takes care of our common home, that takes the faith into the streets like Mary who went with all haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth. We are not talking about converting the Church into an NGO because the Eucharist, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the apex of Christian life. But you can only get to that apex on the road of faith and the following of Jesus.

Sometimes it is the poets who understand best the mysteries of faith. The reflections of the Catalan poet Joan Maragall, looking at a church burned out during the Week of Tragedy in Barcelona in 1909, could be written today. When Maragall went on Sunday to a church that had been burned the week before, he wrote:

“I had never heard a Mass like that one. The ceiling of the church was seriously damaged, the walls smelling of smoke with chipped paint, the altars destroyed, absent, above all, the great black empty space where the high altar was located, the floor almost invisible under the dust of the ruins, no bench on which to sit, and everyone standing or kneeling in front of a wooden table with a crucifix on top, a torrent of sunshine entering through the holes in the roof, with a multitude of flies dancing in the crude light which illuminated the whole church, and it all made it seem as if we were hearing Mass out in the street.”

For Maragall, after the anticlerical violence of the Week of Tragedy, that Mass seemed new, a corner in the catacombs of the first Christians. He thought that the Mass always should be like that: an open door to the poor, the oppressed, the hopeless, for whom the Church was founded. It should not be closed and embellished with riches nor “aided by the rich and powerful who come to put their heart to sleep in the peace of the shadows.” There was no reason to rebuild the burned-out church nor to put doors on it.

It isn't possible to establish easy parallels between the Week of Tragedy and the current pandemic, but what is valid is the intuition of the poet. Let's not build back the Church as it was.

When the pandemic is over, let's not go back to restore the sacramentalist Church of the past. Let's go out into the streets to evangelize, without proselytism, in order to announce the joy of the good news of Jesus to those who don't go into a church. Thus, it will make total sense to celebrate in the Christian community the breaking of the bread and the rest of the sacraments.

60 DAYS OF CONFINEMENT

May 12, 2020, by Josetxo Ordóñez¹³

13. He studied Law and has a doctorate in Philosophy. He works in the Fundació Migra Studium where he coordinates the visits to the Center for the Internment of Foreigners in the Free Zone of Barcelona.

Odysseus jumped to his feet and began to look at his homeland.
He gave a pitiful shout, he struck his legs with his hands
And with lamentation he said, Woe is me! To what land of mortals have I come?
Are they perhaps proud, savage and lacking in justice?
Or friends of strangers and with pious feelings toward others?

The Odyssey, Canto XIII

Today completes sixty days since the decree of a state of alarm in which the population was confined to their houses and all activities of production were suspended along with face-to-face education on all levels, the administration of justice and all non-essential services. As much as possible, all of us have looked for help by teleworking, social networks, digital means of communication, and balconies and terraces in order to maintain the physical thread which ties us one to another and which had been interrupted by the said decree.

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You all probably agree with me that in these sixty days a thousand things have happened. It is so much so that we have discovered a hidden life, latent in the middle of the city, or in the middle of the kitchen or at the window of our houses. Each one of the people that we have met in confinement since March 14 can be held up as a model of these discoveries.

I only want to refer to one that has strongly caught my attention: the exponential growth everywhere of reflection and thought. Through print media, through video conferences, through television programs, through channels of live programming, etc., there has rained down an avalanche of thought. Philosophers, sociologists, scientists, economists, political commentators, theologians, psychologists, artists, newspaper reporters ... they have all asked at one time or another, "What is happening?" "And, "What will happen after the coronavirus?"

I should tell you that I have felt stunned by so many and such good ideas, analyses, and forecasts that I have heard, read and contemplated. I will tell you that even reading essays, novels and monographs about the most varied topics that have fallen into my hands during this confinement has caused me to relate them with the coronavirus and apply their wisdom to the matter of the pandemic. For example, I have again read *The Odyssey*. Now that I hardly go out of my house, it seemed like the right thing to do was to return to the adventures of a traveler who was delayed for years in returning to his home country after the Trojan War. Homer has also made me think about the coronavirus in the

search for a life free of sudden shocks, of a sure home to which we all dream of returning to rest and where we feel safe. For that reason, I have allowed myself to cite in the heading of this text the words of Ulysses on the beach of Ithaca. Later on, you will know why I chose these words and not others.

With so much reflection and thought, there have been those who have asked themselves about the effects of the confinement, the psychological consequences, and even for the possible after-effects or the worsening of the mental health of the population as a consequence of the confinement. The majority talk about the symptoms of post-traumatic stress. It has reminded me precisely of the so-called “Ulysses syndrome”, represented by extreme migratory grief that can be suffered by an emigrant with chronic and multiple stress.

And note this well, all this in hardly sixty days. Before the coronavirus we would have said that it didn't seem to be that much time. Would we now be capable of saying that these sixty days have passed as quickly as a sigh? I think not, that sixty days are like that and much more. Although before it might have seemed a short time in our busy lives sixty days is not that, as we have been able to experience during this confinement.

In these sixty days the Spanish economy has fallen off a cliff, unemployment has shot up, and the state of well-being that still survived among us was worn away even more. The inequalities have grown and also the basic needs. Collective solidarity has more and greater challenges. And 28,000 fellow citizens have lost their lives because of COVID-19,

So much in such little time. With good reason we feel tired, bored and the need to alleviate our confinement. Scaling back, phases, reopening, time slots, seating capacity, social distancing ... We recognize that sixty days has become for us a very, very long time.

Well, I have brought you here by means of these lines so that we can make a short reflection. Do you know that sixty days is the length of time of deprivation of freedom of migrant persons in the terrible centers of internment for foreigners, the CIE? Do you know that these same sixty days of confinement are the days that the law of foreign nationality allows for locking up people whose only crime is having migrated and not having some papers in order? Now will you dare to argue that it doesn't matter that persons who are vulnerable, sick, defenseless, seeking refuge, underage, innocent, might spend sixty days without setting foot in the street, deprived of their rights? That sixty days fly past? That sixty days of internment in a CIE are a little less than a vacation in a welcoming center? That sixty days of internment cannot destroy people, cause imbalances, mutilate a vulnerable soul?

The next time that someone judges the internees of the CIE, I beg you to stop and think about this damned confinement within which we have been living for sixty days. And afterwards, that you stay silent, under pain of appearing proud, savage and lacking in justice.

THE SURPRISES OF THE PANDEMIC

May 18, 2020, by Albert Florensa¹⁴

14. Doctorate in Business Administration. Bachelor's degrees in Philosophy and Education Science and Industrial Engineering. For many years he has been a full professor and Chair of Ethics and Christian Thought at the Institut Quimic de Sarrià.

The pandemic has surprised us with three facts: a) we can't do everything; b) we are all related to each other and to nature; and c) there are people who give themselves to others beyond what can be expected.

We can't do everything

Since the Renaissance, but definitely since the middle of the 18th century, our society has believed that science and technology would free us from all of the urgent situations of nature. It was only a question of time. So much is this so that many people have started to classify old age as a sickness and now they are testing medicine against this new affliction. Moreover, there are some fortunes from Silicon Valley that have dedicated large sums of money to obtain immortality. There is talk about overcoming biological limits, including those cognitive ones that characterize human beings, and in this way beginning a new era for humankind and transhumanism.

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But it turns out that things are not that clear cut and a virus has rudely made that evident. We can't do everything. When it seemed as if the Heideggerian characterization of the human being as "a being meant for death" was becoming obsolete, it turns out that it is still being suggested. Yes, we have incurable diseases, but not pandemics, and without them death can be better disguised. Now it is very difficult to dissemble our impotence, because we have been even forced to transform our leisure spaces into morgues.

Of course, we have to continue investigating, ideating and building, since all of these are anthropological characteristics, but at the same time we ought to be conscious of our limitations. In reality, this consciousness helps us to be deeply human. Vulnerability makes us ask about our existence, and, at the same time, makes us freer at the moment of responding to this essential question. Knowing that we are limited also stops us from exploiting ourselves – very proper to our times as pointed out by Byung-Chul Han – and very possibly will open for us the way not to exploit others.

We are all related to each another and to nature

Ever since the 80's of the last century, in our societies they have made us repeat two mantras: "There is no society, only individuals" and "There is no alternative" [to the model of society in which we live]. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman states that in these societies there has been produced the phenomenon of the privatization of life. You, and only you, have to take the chestnuts out of the fire. No one will worry about you. There is no reason to waste time on altruism, because you will be losing opportunities, nor on thinking, nor much less proposing other models of society because you will just be wasting your time, in addition to your energy and prestige.

Another fact. The massive eruption of screens in our lives is causing the observation of others to lose in large part the capacity to be changed into the source of ethics, something told to us by Emmanuel Levinas.

And now, in the middle of the pandemic, we realize that we have to watch out for one another, that we need each other more than ever. For that reason, we don't go out, we put on masks and we renounce with great pain accompanying our loved ones, even in the hour of death. All that in order to protect each other.

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Given the fragility of the complex system that forms out economies, they are falling to the ground. Besides, it has been quite some time since we perverted the market – that is a good tool if it is controlled by good hands – and it has become an implacable god. Now the idol even dictates justice; a person is poor because he wants to be poor, because the one who works and makes an effort is always rewarded. Therefore, the market god makes us suspicious of the poor and hate them, as stated by Adela Cortina. The market god is cynical; they have put you out of work after 55 years and so what a great opportunity for reinventing yourself! He is also a fool because he doesn't realize that all the cards are marked before the game begins or that when someone arrives in the world, not everyone receives the same social and genetic lottery prize.

If we do not want to suffer a catastrophe greater than the pandemic itself, we are obliged to disobey the restrictive laws of the market and to question the dogmas which are derived from them. We will have to share the wealth and give to those who don't have any either to be housed or even to live.

Moreover, the pandemic has made it clear to us in unmistakable form that humankind is connected with the rest of the planet. The origin of the virus itself, a so-called "wet market" where domestic and wild animals are piled up one on top of another in deplorable conditions, where excrement, blood and all types of entrails are mixed together, is much more than a symbol of the little respect and the little care that we human beings have for animals and for the planet in general. We will have to rethink our relationships with nature and

our necessary connection to it. We will have to revise critically, among other things, certain industrial models of agriculture, animal husbandry and fishing, our eating habits and our avidity for energy and resources. Climate change, contamination and the using up of raw materials are examples of the problems that call for a new relationship of human beings with nature.

There are people who give themselves to others beyond what can be expected

At the climactic point of the pandemic, when the hospitals were supersaturated, when there was a lack of personnel, when there was no personal protective gear, the majority of the health care professionals went beyond what they were required to do by law, even beyond obligations of ethics. Some of them put their lives in danger when nothing more than their consciences could oblige them to do it. Their giving impressed us so much that we began to applaud them and today we keep on applauding.

We would have preferred that no one would have had to get to these extremes and we should watch to assure that these terrible circumstances never repeat themselves. However, we know the probability that, at any given moment, reality might offer us the option of renouncing all that we have every right to conserve. Those that have renounced have been essential because of their specific jobs, obviously, but also for their being examples, which has caused others upon seeing them to follow their example of renunciation.

And I am referring not only to the doctors and nurses, but also to the rest of the personnel who made possible the functioning of a hospital or a geriatric residence, or those institutions which take in dependent persons who need the care and supervision of others. I refer also to many scientists who give themselves enthusiastically to research in spite of the uncertainty of work and the economy. Let's not forget about those who have carried on the so-called "essential work". Nor do I want to leave unmentioned those who because of their socioeconomic situation have had to put themselves to work in risky jobs that no one wants to do, for example, those who distribute food to homes.

Setting aside the more qualified and well-known, a good part of those who form the groups that I have just mentioned normally remain invisible, unrecognized and badly paid. That is, they form part of those that our society classifies as "dirty", a term that defines well those who, in the words of Ignacio Ellacuria, are capable of "taking charge of reality", "carrying reality", and "taking on reality"; definitely, those who are capable of sticking their hands into reality and, obviously, they end up "dirtying themselves".

It turns out that a group formed by many “dirty men” and even more “dirty women” has been changed into the key to defend us from the pandemic. Without them, the disaster would have been much greater.

When we go back through history, we discover that, when everything is going badly, it is usually the “dirty men and women” who work. They face the difficulty and, at times, die so that the rest of us can keep going forward. That is a curious thing in a society that praises success and recognition, and that often makes fun of those that give of themselves freely and anonymously.

It is said that philosophy is the fruit of surprise and words. The surprise is not lacking. The pandemic has shown up the error of some conceptions of the world that our society preached as beyond doubt: that we could do anything, that we did not need anyone other than ourselves and that under no circumstances did we have to voluntarily give up anything to which we were entitled, much less give ourselves without pay to anyone. We also have words. These days there are many who express with great clarity these surprises. This brings us to take charge of reality.

In the days that are to come, we will have to avoid falling into the trap of distraction and we will have to pay attention to the cries for help of those who will be affected economically – the same ones as always and a few others. In this way we will carry reality on our shoulders.

And we will have to take charge of reality which is nothing less than, when we accept that we are vulnerable and are questioned by the faces of everyone else, we will feel ourselves called without excuses to concrete action.

Finally, perhaps some men and women will give themselves over to others unconditionally. We will have to support them.

COMMUNITY AND EUCHARIST

May 21, 2020, by Javier Vitoria¹⁵

15. Priest of the diocese of Bilbao. Retired professor of the Theology Department at Deusto. Visiting professor at the Catholic University in El Salvador. Member of *Cristianismo i Justicia*. Member of the editorial board of the magazine *Iglesia Viva*.

The pandemic and the state of alarm have suspended the Eucharists and the public liturgical celebrations of the Church. This uncommon suspension has coincided with the most important liturgical seasons of the Church, Lent and Easter, including the celebration of the Paschal Triduum. The new technologies, via the Internet, have given us the opportunity to “celebrate” the Eucharist digitally. I myself “celebrated” the Paschal Triduum and the Eucharists of the Sundays of Easter thanks to the celebrations on YouTube that the Jesuits offer daily.

In these circumstances, many people have asked themselves if in the future the Church shouldn’t make this form of Eucharistic celebration into something normal, just like what has happened with telework and teleteaching.

My response is sifted through my personal experience. I am a priest accustomed to preside at Eucharists in parish communities, made up of women and men with whom I live every day in the usual hustle and bustle of a neighborhood in my city. Not in my wildest imagination would it have occurred to me to celebrate the Paschal Triduum and the Sunday Eucharists of the Easter season in my house, by myself, given that this year, for the first time in fifty-two years, I couldn’t preside at or attend the celebrations. Neither have I done it via Skype with my small community, although on the days of the Paschal Triduum and on Sundays we have gathered for prayer in that way.

I have taken advantage of the digital offering of the Jesuits. I am very grateful for their service, in the production of which they have placed Christian quality and human warmth. Undoubtedly, their Eucharists have helped me to live the Pasch of the Lord in a time of pandemic. Their liturgy of the Word seemed to me singularly outstanding. Those who are seated in the pews for the Sunday celebrations do not always listen to homilies so faithful to the proclaimed Word, so well contextualized in the present and so understandable from the perspective of communication.

The digital celebrations have seemed to me an important spiritual help and complement to that of our community prayer meetings. Nevertheless, I have missed the sacramental dimension of the communal celebration of the Eucharist.

The communitarian link created by a digital system is not sufficient material for the Eucharist, the highest point in the encounter with God by the Chris-

tian community in memory of Jesus of Nazareth (bread broken and shared) through the action of the Spirit.

The digital media of today offer a possibility of communication between persons which was unimaginable a short time ago. Just a few days ago, some good friends with a married son in Australia were telling me how happy they were because they could see their grandchildren and talk with them via a teleconference. We should congratulate ourselves because this possibility exists. Not very long ago one had to put up with hours of delay to be able to speak telephonically with a family member who lived in another town in your own province. But we can't forget something which this time of confinement and social distancing has taught us. An embrace and a kiss have more quality and human warmth than a videoconference, to touch each other more than to see each other on a screen, to eat and drink together more than being together on What's App.

That is how Jesus understood it. He invited his followers to share a Supper and not a meeting in His memory. We all know it. It is not possible to eat supper digitally. The presence of the community in the place where the Supper of the Lord is being celebrated seems to me a fundamental element, absolutely necessary for the fullness of the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist.

45 The word "sacrament" evokes the "encounter" with God in history and not simply His transcendent "Presence". The Presence of God in the world depends on His will, fulfilled in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit over all creation which is also the spirit of the resurrected Jesus. The "encounter" of God with men and women depends on the synergistic activation of the Presence with human reality. In the Christian tradition, this possibility has happened in Jesus Christ (the original sacrament of encounter with God), in the Church (the fundamental sacrament), and in the sacraments that are the signs in which the Church officially decided to make itself present as such, making explicit its being, reaffirming its faith and fulfilling its mission.

This ecclesial presence should take substance in a community present in the celebration of all the sacraments, including that of penance – for as much as some ecclesiastical authorities are saying the opposite. But it becomes especially determinative in the Eucharist where we celebrate the Supper of the Lord. How can this supper take place if the invited guests don't attend? How will the event of the encounter with God in memory of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit be produced without the human experience of having been invited to eat together by a host who is God? The person who presides at the Supper does it in the name of Christ, head of the Church, but he is also the one who serves at table because he does that (or at least is supposed to) in the daily life of the community. In no case can he substitute for the guests in the celebration. Without guests, there is no celebration.

You can say to me with good reason that many times – maybe too many – the communitarian entity is also scarce at the face-to-face eucharists. I am not going to go into that question now. I will only add one final reflection to conclude:

As a justification, the classic principle of “ecclesia supplet” (CIC 144) is often used. It expresses the power of dispensation of the Church when the sacraments are not administered according to the norms of the ecclesiastical order. But, when the principle is used recurrently in a habitual manner, we are making excuses for not taking on the great challenge presented by the liturgical reform proposed by Vatican Council II, which was left in the swamp after the approval of the use of the vernacular languages in the celebration of the Eucharist.

WE WILL NOT COME OUT OF THE PANDEMIC THE SAME; WE WILL COME OUT WORSE OR BETTER. IT DEPENDS ON US (I)

June 3, 2020, by J. I. González Faus

One of the great lessons that COVID-19 has taught us has been to remember again to what extent we human creatures are fragile, exposed to unknown forces that can cause us great damage and that we can always pretend to have already under control.

After each plague or “Spanish flu” we react as if we have overcome it for good and that now it will never be repeated. We do the same thing after each tsunami and each Chernobyl. Instead of recognizing our fragility, we put our trust in the power of science.

And of course, science is worthy of admiration and necessary. But we idolize it and we place all of our confidence in it. We forget that what forms part of it is the fact that each answer it gives raises a new question and that each practical problem that it resolves ends up shedding light on a new problem. We have tried to calm ourselves by talking about “experts” and turning to them, but no one, absolutely no one, was an expert on COVID-19. Naturally, some epidemiologists and related specialists were able to have some useful data about how we should behave, but they have seen themselves overwhelmed by the new characteristics of this other epidemic. Nevertheless, we continue desiring “to return to normal”, when this expression doesn’t mean anything more than a return to our fragility and our forgetfulness about it.

But the worst thing is, in addition to being fragile, we are cruel and our normal consists in hiding the pain of the world. In this world (which we believe has been changed into a “global village”) every day 25,000 human beings die of hunger, 9000 of whom are children. Doesn’t it seem incredible that we can not only eat but feast serenely without being bitten by the hunger and desperation of those mothers that cannot ease the hunger of their children? And in this same world, obesity is one of our greatest sicknesses. With all that is spent on therapies and weight loss, or the quantity of foodstuff that is destroyed in order to maintain higher prices, we would have enough to ease the desperation of those who suffer from hunger.

In this “global village” there are millions of people who are victims of war with those wounds that cannot be healed well and with the need to become

part of those theoretical “refugees” of whom very few will find a welcome in another place. And people who consider themselves to be “civilized” obtain part of their wealth in the sale of arms and in all the business that it generates, so that those who are “uncivilized” can shoot at each other better, although they have to feed themselves badly.

This human species continues practicing torture, with procedures that are calculated, refined and startling. There are even schools where they teach how to torture and how to export this science to those countries which are less “civilized”. In this world of human dignity, there is traffic in human beings to be used for medical experimentation or sexual exploitation. It is moving to realize the amount of slavery that is endured by these poor creatures.

In this world that proclaims the equality of rights of every human being, there are people who possess four or five luxury mansions in various cities on the planet and people who sleep in the street because they lack those “four walls” and the kind of bed which we throw in the trash. There are invincible mafias that deal in drugs, that kill with impunity those that create the smallest difficulty for them and who come to constitute something like a “parallel and invasive state” in some countries.

In this world that seems so unified, there is 1 % of the population that possesses almost as much wealth as the other 99 %. But instead of defaming them as thieves, we respect and venerate them as if their fortunes were the fruit of their own merits. We have come to the point of establishing as a principle of civility the belief that all of the rich got that way through their own merits and all of the poor and suffering are so through their own fault. It is the best way not to be concerned about them. At the same time, it permits us to dismantle little by little public health and education – with the excuse of fixing them – because the greatest human needs are always a great source of enrichment for the few.

In this world where everyone has freedom of expression but only a few have the possibility of exercising that freedom, those few proclaim that “humankind has never been as well off as it is today” or that “we are better off than ever”. A pseudoscience that (even if it were true) only serves to put our conscience to sleep because it transmits the feeling that “we are well enough”.

This world, which is so proud of its “progress”, has created societies where football players are more important than nurses. It uproots its businesses and moves them to Asia in order to employ children who should be in school. The practice is defended by arguing that in this way there is some money coming into their homes and that is worth more than nothing (since the companies don’t want to hire their parents because they would have to be paid more). This world has injected into mother Earth a mortal infirmity – we don’t know yet if it is incurable- while it refuses to change the direction of its progress, limiting itself to applying a few hot, wet cloths to the gravely ill earth.

And in a lesser tone, but also with the necessity of not hiding it, the theoretically most advanced part of this world proclaims that it lives in a democracy, while it is subjected to the cruel dictatorship of a few economic powers that have not been elected by anyone and yet condition all the activity of the politicians. They do that to the point that, in the case of crises and indebtedness, it is considered more important to assure the benefits to the banks than the subsistence of persons. We are even satisfied with an evil called democracy, where the parliament could better call itself “insult-ment” because there, they will not have a dialog to make agreements, but only insult and disrespect each other. It is where we attend a pantomime of voting whose final results are known ahead of time. So, these sessions could be suppressed without anything’s happening, communicating only the results of the previous negotiations. In that way time and money could be saved which could be used to give classes in civility to some representatives of the people. And to teach the politicians that that liberty – which they so encourage at other moments – they now have it in order to vote what their consciences dictate and not what is dictated by the party.

Also, because those democracies proclaim their almost religious faith in the god Market whose providence regulates all relationships, but later those who call themselves *theservants of the people* assign to themselves the payment for their own services. And then also for their retirement, without the option that allows for the boss they serve (the public) to make that decision. Then they will defend the “labor market”, but they have excluded themselves from that market. In that way there has been created a kind of “clericalism of politicians” to which it is worth applying the hard words of Pope Francis against ecclesiastical clericalism.

This world which is so inhumane has a diagnosis that we manage not to know or that we refuse to accept: “The root of all evil is the passion for private wealth” (cf. 1 Tim 6:10). That passion (justified moreover as a virtue) has brought us to build a “market society” instead of a “society of togetherness”, and to establish competition as the fundamental principle in place of the basic principle of solidarity.

The best proof of the desolation of this panorama is that we refuse to look at it, simply because we would not sustain it and because it blames us even without saying anything. We engage in the frequent gesture of turning off the television set when it informs us about an infinitesimally small part of everything that has been said, offering that worn-out phrase “Ay, not while I am eating!”. But when it is only the simple image that stops us from eating, we ought to ask ourselves if the reality allows us to eat. Pardon me if it is very harsh, but I also ask myself the same thing.

It is this world and these human beings which have been run over by the pandemic for which they were unprepared.

WE WILL NOT COME OUT OF THE PANDEMIC THE SAME; WE WILL COME OUT WORSE OR BETTER. IT DEPENDS ON US (II)

June 11, 2020, by J. I. González Faus

Isn't this such a cruel and inhumane world that it deserves one of the so-called *Biblical plagues*? But we don't need any "punishing" God because it is our own conduct that has now placed us before a double threat that will force us to choose whether to keep going as we always have at the cost of the lives of half of humankind and destroying our home – which I don't dare call "common" – or to look for what in the Bible is usually called conversion, translating a Hebrew word that means a "change of direction". In spite of everything that I have said in the first of this triad of articles, if we read those marvelous Biblical poems called *Lamentations* (falsely attributed to Jeremiah) we can discover something important. The fact that Jerusalem was taken and completely destroyed was something so incredible for a Jew (and seemed to be ratified by previous experience) that the pain and desperation that sprang up there at that time can change our terror in facing COVID-19 into mere crocodile tears. I don't know if more serious laments have ever been written in all of human history.

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And yet, in the midst of all that desperation, the voice of the poet comes back to life and resounds. That man who says he has "been subject to grief" and that "they have uprooted peace, and happiness is not remembered". dares to cry out immediately that "the mercy of the Lord does not end and His compassion is never finished", that "the Lord does not take pleasure in affliction, but rather always is compassionate", and that "gives him hope" (See Chapter 3 of the *Book of Lamentations*).

We don't have to make a religious reading out of all of this. It is enough that we have what we could call an earthly faith, as long as it is truly faith and not just a false illusion, easy and comfortable. Let's recall the celebrated verse from Holderlin: "Where there is danger, what will save us grows. But it doesn't grow by itself. It needs to be cultivated by us."

Today like small stars in the night, the media have commented on marvelous things like that the emissions of carbon dioxide have decreased, like that our atmosphere has become cleaner and like the number of traffic accidents has decreased. Like how we have discovered the capacity for sacrifice, of solidarity and of tenderness in our health personnel. They are small things, but

they can be germs. And their ability to do that depends on us, although it requires some serious study and a constant effort on our part.

Let's take the repeated slogan "trial and error" from the scientific method. We should apply it now not to any particular problem, but to our whole attitude toward the cosmos and human life. And then, as much in our original way of looking at things and opening ourselves to the world as in the thousand practical questions that can be derived from that. With respect to the first of those, we now have sufficient evidence that there has been an error in our way of being in this world.

If on this planet Earth there live billions of persons and each one of them has unalienable dignity and some sacred rights, it seems that the first goal of all human life on Earth should be to build ways of living together. "How good it is and how pleasant to live as one like brothers," the psalmist sang. No more technical progress, nor superfluous wellbeing, nor invincible arms, nor more untouchable ghettos, but rather living together in the greatest possible peace and harmony. If culture and the humanities are so important, it is because in them the question of living together and personal relationships is fundamental. And because by living together in a sane and established way, greater levels of happiness can be found for all of humankind.

If we accept this point of view (looking now at this Western world that attributes to itself the disputable mission of the leadership of the planet), I would like to point out what could be the great "original sin" of the West: individualism. It is a blight which pervades all of our history and all of our modernity. It is worth climbing a bit to take a look at our deepest roots.

It has been pointed out now on more than three occasions that the origin of that individualism is found in the philosophy of Descartes and in the famous "I think, therefore I am." In a moment of total and absolute doubt, the first and greatest certainty and beginning point of all reflection is myself. "I think, therefore I am." In spite of his recourse to "clear and distinct ideas" in order to advance, Descartes never found a way of recasting that initial insight to arrive at the truly certain starting point: "We exist, therefore I am." And since all geniuses are ahead of their time, perhaps we should say that Descartes was the first person who took a selfie even without having a smart phone. That is our most original way of being in the world.

And that original sin continues infecting all of the history that followed. The absolute imperative of our modernity was thus proclaimed by one of the fathers of the so-called Enlightenment: "*Sapere aude*", that is, dare to know and situate yourself by yourself because only in that way will you leave behind "a culpable childhood". Kant intuited something important and decisive in speaking that way, but that intuition came already paved by Cartesian individualism. It is an imperative that is directed to me as an isolated individual. The

good Kant never found a way to say to us *sapere audeamus* (“Let us dare to decide among everything”). The result is that, if millions of people decide to think and act on their own (and putting to one side the fundamental datum that that would not have been possible without the previous positive influence of many others in his or her development) a clash of attitudes and decisions will ensue that will lead to confrontation and end up reducing human togetherness to the suppression of enemies, on the one hand, and to mere tactical alliances on the other.

So, there we are. To say that you dare to make a decision is something modern and stimulating, but when it is said in an individualistic way, you can end up in that collection of irresponsible people who in these past few days have strolled through the streets without masks and without keeping social distance, sure of themselves and without thinking about others. How different would have been advice about which all of us might have dared to be conscious at the same time!

Someone who glimpsed all of this original error and did not know how to resolve it was the feared and defamed Karl Marx. This will be his long-lasting effect on us and it is for that reason that he annoys us so much. His provocative critique of the rights of mankind that are proclaimed by the West as the “rights of alienated mankind” isn’t completely true. All of his declarations are made in the plural as rights of all human beings. But he is correct in the individualistic form in which we have understood those declarations: as my rights or, at most, of my group, and nothing more. In that way we have ended up calling *rights* what are really just many *desires*. Thus, it is like capitalism perverting freedom into a right to oppress. Because human rights either are for everyone or they are not rights (in any case, they would be of the “right” if I can be permitted the irony). And for as big as the freedom might be, no one has the freedom to harm others or to put them in danger.

Having accepted part of this criticism as a claim to the others, Marx does not find the synthesis when, faced with the theme of death, he does not know what to say other than “it is a hard-won victory of the species over the individual.” The “generic being” - which could be a good formulation of what Marx offers - is deformed as a being that is “only generic”, where the individual disappears into the species. And that gives way to that undeniably foolish act - or superstition, not appropriate for an atheist - that no commandment to love is necessary. Only by changing the relationships of production, egoism will be conquered and in turn that will produce “the unification of the individual being and the generic being”, without any necessity of appealing to love. The thing is that we all need to believe in “something”.

And now I don’t know if it is too much of a stretch to say that from that point we pass to an existentialism that discovers man with a limited finitude

and unlimited freedom in order to conclude that “hell is others”. Its author had to nuance the statement by saying that hell is others when I can’t exploit them or take advantage of them. But we should remember that that phrase is written in a situation of “confinement” (*No Exit* is the title of the work of Sartre). Thus, we arrive at the “transhumanism” of today, which recognizes that human beings should be profoundly changed, but aspires to obtain it through technology and genetics.

Curiously, Christianity and Buddhism, as examples of the two cosmic visions that have most insisted in the conquest of the ego, are characterized by having communitarian visions of the cosmos. The *shanga* in Buddhism and the Church in Christianity are considered essential. And that in spite of (or precisely because of) the fact that they attempt to get to the deepest part of the individual. We Christians have not considered sufficiently to what point all of the official Christian prayers are communitarian prayers. The “Our Father” always speaks in the plural. The prayers to the Holy Spirit (which after the previous prayer are the most central to Christian life) always ask in the plural: “Fill the hearts of your people”, “visit the minds of your people”, “welcoming light, fill the deepest part of the hearts of your faithful”. In each of those plurals is reflected the mindset that we had been missing before: I am because we are.

If this analysis is valid, we can open ourselves to a future which will be marked by the option between imperatives, which we can put this way: the technological imperative or the human imperative. The first one means that when something is possible, speaking technologically, it has just to be done, without any consideration for the effects that it might bring to all of humankind. If it is possible to build an atomic bomb, build it, without paying attention to the damage that it can do. If it is possible to go to the moon, then we should go there right away, without considering if that is what humankind needs most. If it is possible to destroy the planet for our own advantage, then destroy it, having confidence that later science will find a solution for us. We could continue with examples from genetics, but it would be more useful to note to what point we justify ourselves, sometimes arguing that ‘if I don’t do it, someone else will’ (according to that principle of competitiveness as the first rule for living together which we discussed at the end of the previous part). At other times we argue, using a superstition similar to that of Marx, that everything that is technologically possible is humanly good.

The other imperative we can see in the celebrated title that Leonardo Boff gave to his first book about the ecological drama: *Ecology, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. That the earth is crying out is something that we have now begun to accept. They tell us also that COVID-19 will end up being a disaster for the poor who can neither isolate themselves nor stop going to work for even a single day because that is what provides their daily sustenance. And if it seems

that until now the pandemic has respected them more because they are countries that are more closed without as much flow of people as we (or perhaps because we have less information about them), now desperate situations have begun to appear in countries like Ecuador (in Guayaquil, for example), Brazil or Peru.

Also, however, since this virus has affected us the rich first, bringing our fragility into relief (as we said in the first part), which is also a form of poverty, the title from Boff can be extended in the following way: “Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, Cry of Humankind”. This seems to be the true horizon that we have before us.

Therefore, what remains is if, among everything, we dare to look a little into how things ought to be, we will achieve that horizon as a community.

WE WILL NOT COME OUT OF THE PANDEMIC THE SAME; WE WILL COME OUT WORSE OR BETTER. IT DEPENDS ON US (III)

June 17, 2020, by J. I. González Faus

Our future is marked by two opposing threats. One would be a repetition of the pandemic that would oblige us to go backwards again and which is completely probable while vaccines don't exist for general use. The other threat is an economic crisis which they are predicting will be terrible and besides will not be one of the classic crises of capitalism which springs from a decline of offer or demand, but rather a new crisis that is born out a paralysis of production. In either case, we ought to make sure that it is not resolved like the past crisis of 2008 with its criminal formula of austerity for the poorest and benefits for the rich. In Spain, that crisis permitted the richest citizens to go from controlling 44 % of the wealth to controlling 53 %, while the real salary of the poorest 10 % of the population fell 30 % (and these are not the data from a Pablo Iglesias, but rather the Bank of Spain). We must not forget the numbers of health personnel who had to emigrate and who have been so lacking now.

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Faced with this prospect, the reflection of the previous article imposes on us a principle that makes concrete that *sapere audeamus* (let us dare to think together) with which we corrected Kant and that becomes concrete in a principle coined at the start of globalization: think globally and act locally. And this is what today seems as necessary as it is impossible. Let's look at some examples.

1. Universal service opposed to individual benefit

COVID-19 has surprised us at a time of obsessive and exclusive local thinking. A good example of this is the repeated denunciation by Noam Chomsky. The pharmaceutical industry was sufficiently alerted to the great probability of this pandemic. But they thought that trying to stop the pandemic would not bring them any benefit, while the outbreak of a pandemic always means a source of earnings in vaccines and medicines.

That individualism generated this ironic notice but I don't know who said it: "Much more dangerous than the coronavirus is the virus of fear." And this panic has made the economic crisis seem to be something sure and terrible even from before it appeared. As a matter of fact, in the great crises of the past

(the Black Plague of the middle of the 19th century and the Spanish flue of 1918) millions of people died, many more than now, but there was no economic crisis. There are those what would argue that there were all those many deaths in a much smaller world population that was the reason they avoided the economic crisis. Maybe, I don't know. But what is undeniable is that our economic powers are going through right now a wave of panic before the crisis has arrived. And panic, besides fomenting egoism and cruelty ("Let those who can, save themselves!"), is a disastrous economic factor. "Capital is very frightened", euphemistically say the cowardly capitalists.

In any case, it is a possibility that, even worse than the coronavirus, will be the market-virus. It will be necessary to avoid it, but I don't see how.

2. Authority facing armament and fiscal havens

As necessary as it is impossible to obtain is the existence of a UN with true world-wide authority over global problems, of course with no right of veto, and with a world court of justice that mandates for every country. It would be an authority that would hold in reserve a large part of the use and production of arms, thus freeing up a large quantity of wealth to be invested in public health for everyone and not used in the destruction of some by others. Such an authority would be the only one capable of doing away with that other affirmation of the freedom of one individual against the lives of the rest that are the fiscal havens. It is impossible to do away with them on the merely local level because many small countries which are considered respectable (Luxembourg, Holland, etc.) function as such.

In sum, another wasted source of income.

3. Energy vs. contamination

Thinking globally, we will also understand the need to do away with all of the contaminating industries and to invest in renewable energy that can create many jobs. Although in the short term this might not produce more benefit than a healthier planet, a healthier planet will afterwards lead to a healthier life.

4. Limit on income and benefits

To think globally would force us to end the economic imperative of seeking the "maximum benefit" in every investment and operation, with which there would disappear the dislocations that ultimately have done so much damage

to many people as well as great benefits to a few. It could be ended by setting universal legal limits on salaries and earnings. Heaven cries out for there to exist legally a minimum salary and a maximum salary!

5. Taxes and property

Along that same line it is absolutely necessary - and impossible?- to have very high taxes on all the multimillionaires and even higher for the billionaires. This proposal which is so necessary, which will be rejected furiously, forces us to recall that the most primary right to property is that all of the goods of the earth should be accessible to all, not to a few. Therefore, the right to private property is a secondary right that ought to give way before the other primary right. It follows that all private property that creates an obstacle to the primary right is simply robbery where the goods should be returned.

All of the data lead us to see that the argument that many measures that would be useful in order to give us more protection or prevent the probability of a resurgence of the pandemic is a false one, above all because the measures are impossible since there is not the money for them. In reality, what there isn't is the will to manage to obtain the financing where that should be done.

6. Minimum income or basic work

In any case, the data cited above about the impoverishment of a large part of Spain and the rise in inequality (data carefully forgotten) has brought the current government to what is called *Minimum Living Income* which has just been approved. Thank you.

This proposal had been criticized by an episcopal voice (opposed to the others) who feared that some workers would then become lazy. Although this danger is real, it is not sufficient to deprive others of something that is as necessary as it is minimal (I would see more danger in that the income would come to persons who do not need it). But I think that there exists an even better solution and that is that the State becomes the guarantor of not just an income but of a job. Asis said by *Le Monde Diplomatique*, "The State should guarantee a job. The new plan of Sanders and Ocasio Cortez includes this simple but essential measure. The State offers to finance employment for any person that desires to work for the base salary of the public sector, or more. In the same way that the central banks are the lenders 'of last resort' in the financial crises, with guaranteed employment the State becomes the financier 'of last resort' for employment. With employment guaranteed, work stops being merchandise since its existence and utility are not determined by the market." (May, 2020, p. 15).

Thus, the malicious euphemism of *labor market* will disappear which (as Polanyi criticized years ago) is really a market for workers, of people. And so, a slave market in our “civilized society” of the 21st century.

7. Consumerism

At this point we can derive another correction to our society of wealth that is fundamental and as necessary as it is impossible. This is to do away with the exacerbation of consumption brought on by the creation of false needs. What is called the *consumer society* has placed in it all the meaning of life and its catechism begins with this: “Man was created to consume.” The Korean philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes that we have changed the world into large box stores and all human relationships into commercial relationships. Thus, we have come to what he calls “the tired-out society”. Because, in the long run, we have seen that consumerism neither gives us the happiness that it promises nor does it give us a sense of what to live for. That has led to the reappearance of a multitude of fundamentalist extremists (above all nationalistic and xenophobic) that offer a cause for which to live and to enroll in. Besides, out of that need for meaning, people are ready to accept things in a fundamentalist and uncritical way. Health workers, whom we have so applauded in these days, have found a much larger meaning in their dedication to health than what others look for in a consumerism that is without brakes or solidarity. This is in spite of the fact that their dedication has been excessive, draining and risky because our social tendency to believe more in our power than in our fragility smashed into them without warning or resources.

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Well, if we could only learn that a certain moderate protectionism can be necessary so that we don't return to seeing ourselves one day totally without masks and respirators, obliged to look for them at thousands of kilometers of distance and as fast as possible, and exposing ourselves to the classic cons and deceptions that these situations of anxiety usually bring about. But we, proud of our power and forgetful of our fragility, had thought that we were never going to need them and that it was much more income-producing to make armaments and cars and airplanes and luxury goods than those unnecessary items producing little income.

8. Moderate tourism

Recognizing that we are not talking about complete suppression but rather moderation or sobriety of consumption, the same norm would apply to another structure of our “normal” life, a source of so much income and evils:

tourism. It is a bad thing that the economy of a country revolves more around tourism and services than production as has happened in Spain. It is shameful that Germany, with much less sun than we, has outdone us in the installation of renewable energy. It is regrettable that a large part of our Mediterranean, obsessed with immediate benefits, has left the cultivation of the land and (parodying J. M. Serrat) has “dumped there a thousand blocks [of houses] from Marbella to Sant Feliu” and now can’t “paint blue the white nights” of the singer.

Leaving Spain, we recall the atrocious tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean that cost the lives of 300,000 people and for which the word *maremoto* [“sea quake”] did not even serve us to name it and we had to resort to the Japanese word (in composition very similar to Castilian). Well, many ecologists then held that the cause that enlarged its dimensions was having destroyed, for the sake of tourism, a whole chain of mangrove trees that would have put the brakes on the force of the water. Without going so far as that, it seems shameful that in order to attract tourists, poor countries create luxury resorts that are light years above the living standard of their inhabitants.

Neither does it seem necessary to have that kind of asinine tourism represented by so many people who travel not to learn, but only to take pictures and show them to their neighbors when they return home. Tourism is good and enchanting and it can teach a great deal. But again, it should maintain limits of sobriety if we want it to be humane tourism and not tourism of money.

9. Life or freedom?

As is seen, COVID-19 has placed before us the impossibility (and the necessity) of joining together life and liberty. It has reminded me of a phrase of Margaret Thatcher from when she sent a few Englishmen to die in the Malvinas [Falklands]: “There are things that are worth more than life, for example, freedom.” What she wanted to say by that was that freedom itself, hers, was not worth her own life, but the lives of others. That is exactly how some people are trying today to resolve that dilemma. We should know that it is a mistaken path.

But, how can we harmonize the care for life and the respect for freedom?

10. Take into consideration all of the factors that enter in

All of the points which have been included have a common feature which has been fundamental also in focusing well the current pandemic. It is the first that I wanted to bring out in a sheet that the magazine *New Life* asked me to do at the beginning of this pandemic. In order to make the correct decision it

is necessary to consider all, or at least the greater part, of the factors that enter into play in that question. We are inclined to look at only a few of those factors which are those that most favor our point of view. The way of proceeding of many politicians brings this into focus.

So, we are surrounded by tasks that are as necessary as they are “impossible”. This is what accounts for the fear (as has been expressed by very serious thinkers like Adela Cortina and Ignacio Ramonet) that we will not come out very well from this pandemic. What the second of those has said is that we are not dealing with “returning to normal” because our normal has been the cause of the problem and not the solution. It has been a consequence of the Cartesian autism which we saw in the previous part (“I think and therefore I am”) instead of putting into practice the more complete truth: “We exist and so I exist”.

In other words, and to bring this to an end. The martyr Ignacio Ellacuria left as a legacy that humankind has no way to act except as “a civilization based on shared seriousness.” You can object that this is an impossibility, but the other alternative is a civilization of shared self-destruction.

DID ANYONE FIND OUT ABOUT THE NATIONAL MOURNING FOR THE CORONAVIRUS?

June 15, 2020, by Jaume Flaquer¹⁶

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From May 27 to June 6 we were in national mourning. The BOE [Boletín Oficial del Estado] said it and so it had to be true. The politicians wore black ties but their aggressive words did not fit in very well with the mourning. Even though it was the longest period of mourning that has been decreed by a government of the Spanish democracy, why in reality did Spain not live through a state of grief? Why did the national period of mourning go by without being noticed?

In the first place, because there is no political unity. Mourning requires mutual consoling. Spain seems to be more like that family in which some of the members decide not to attend the funeral because of the disputes about inheritance. In Spain, some parties are preparing like carrion eaters, to pull out pieces of power from what they consider to be a dying government. The same as when in some funerals conflicts break out among the heirs – sometimes forever –, the political parties have been incapable of uniting to remember the thousands of people who have died because of the virus or because of the collapse of the health system that this has provoked.

In second place, because of the mess with numbers. How many do we have to mourn for? We don't even have the exact number nor do we know if some of those who died at the beginning did so because of the virus since it was then impossible to test them.

In third place, because we have perceived that this is not over yet. The threat of the virus is still present and the drip of deaths stops us from closing off the list. How do we mourn for someone who has not yet died? A funeral supposes the beginning of the healing of the felt pain because it helps to assume the reality of the painful event and because the tombstone also closes a chapter of life. Nevertheless, until the appearance of a vaccine our lives continue to be threatened.

In fourth place, because mourning requires a period of reflection and the society is thinking more about getting out and freeing itself from this mourning than in thinking more deeply about the drama it has lived through. We are feeling the urgency of taking off the black of the darkness of the house and putting on the colorful swimsuit to go to the beach.

Finally, in fifth place, many Spaniards need to incorporate the religious dimension in order to overcome the grief. For them, these days have been especially hard. The impossibility of celebrating religious ceremonies – or only doing so with close family members – has impeded the display of all the dimensions of the celebration. Besides that, all the religions have been forced to give up essential elements of their funeral rites because of the pandemic. For Catholics, this has been the accompaniment of a priest at the end of life. For Muslims and Jews, the obligatory ritual washings. For Buddhists, the necessary immobilization of the body during the 72 hours following the death. There has been enormous difficulty in the repatriation of remains to their countries of origin.

It is surely not more than a fleeting idea, but it would be beautiful if, after a great act of remembrance of the dead on the part of the State, all the faithful of each religion would gather together in their various houses of worship in order to say good-bye to their dead with their own rituals. A pause in the political struggle and a simultaneous prayer by all the religions would perhaps help us as a society to overcome in a unified way the drama that we have lived through.

PAYING FOR THE BROKEN PLATES

June 19, 2020, by Xavier Casanovas

A look at the social reaction stemming from the economic crisis of 2008, leaves one with the clear impression that the citizenry took three years to understand what was happening, and therefore to be able to begin to respond. Meanwhile, a political solution was tried by means of austerity and a rescue of the banks which paved the way for a great increase of inequality. We do not know what would have happened if there had been other measures, but as is said repeatedly by the economist Branko Milanovic, between 2007 and 2013 in Spain the poorest 80 % saw their incomes fall by 30 %, while the richest 20 % saw their rise by 10 % in the highest percentiles. Spain has seen how the number of millionaires has multiplied 4.7 times in the last ten years, arriving at 979,000 persons.

We did not know how to react as a society so that the way out of the crisis – if it is that we have ever left it – might be through a redistribution and not through an increase in inequality. It is said that the human being is the only animal who trips twice over the same stone, but this time we cannot allow the same thing to happen.

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If there's something the social and civic entities have learned in the last decade, it's the critical importance of understanding and studying closely the impact of tax policy on society. Taxes should be defended tooth and nail as the tool for an equitable society, where no group is marginalized. They are the last resort of a welfare state that is still in the process of being built. Spain has a tax rate over 6 points below the eurozone average, and many debts straining its state finances. Many outsized financial benefits are taken advantage of especially by those with the highest incomes, a burden on society through the dumping of goods by neighboring countries, competition between neighboring states on estate and inheritance tax rates, and an increasingly underwater economy. In addition to the debts not existent until now, the exceptional economic crisis that we're living through obliges us to also consider extraordinary measures to allow the financial support of families, small businesses and municipalities, not through further draconian indebtedness, but through solidarity and fiscal equity.

Along these lines, the Platform for a Just Financing has just proposed 15 packages of measures that should permit raising up to 34.301 billion Euros if the pertinent fiscal reforms are carried out and if a courageous stand were to

be taken to ask for a greater effort on the part of those who have more. Now we are not dealing with only putting on patches, but rather of taking advantage of the moment in which the citizenry can understand better than ever the need for some good taxes. What is proposed is not revolutionary, but it places the emphasis on the actual injustices of our fiscal system and on what it has been possible to do in these historical moments of global crisis. The members of the Committee on social and economic reconstruction of the Congress would do well to read it.

Now that we have understood the importance of the services to the public and the damages done by the cuts to a health service that has responded in an exemplary manner, now that we see how the world of education needs resources so that our children do not find themselves abandoned in front of a computer with a bad wi-fi connection, now that we know the reality of hundreds of thousands of families in whose houses there will not enter any earnings in the next few months, will someone dare to say that it is not possible to better the progressivity of the IRPE? Or who would be scandalized by the implementation of a COVID Tax in Europe which burdens the estates of more than 1 million Euros at a rate of 1%? Or that burdens the extraordinary earnings generated during the state of alarm or the speculation of someone who has enriched himself in the financial volatility of the last two months? We need more courage and coordination than ever. We owe it to cashiers, transport workers, nurses, food deliverers, those who care for the elderly, and so many other groups who have seen how their buying power fell year by year in the last decade and now have been the last dike in a social and economic system that is spewing water.

Let's not deceive ourselves. We know that we will come out of this crisis poorer and hard times will come, but if there is anything we cannot allow, it is that we come out of it more unequal than when it started.

A LITTLE THEOLOGY IN THE MIDST OF / ABOUT TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

30 July, 2020, by Juan Pablo Espinosa¹⁷

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These are times in which the meaning of I don't know has taken on a new depth. We are in a time of uncertainty. In the midst of this uncertainty, we have lived, thought and wondered about the future. What's going to happen next? When will the pandemic end? Will there be a vaccine? When? Will we ever return to what we know as (and this needs to be between large bold quotation marks) "normality"? To offer one single example: annual calendars. We all had one hundred things planned for this year. In a matter of a couple of days, all of these commitments were cancelled or had to become virtual encounters. Darío Sztajnszrajber, an Argentine philosopher, speaks of learning to tear down our infinite number of assumptions. The period we are living through has reminded us that history and life have an end point. This world is not infinite. We are finite, and our lives share finitude and finality. The essence of our humanity is characterised by the unknown (I don't know) and governed by uncertainty. The fateful myths about progress so common in the modern era with their excess of reason (J. Gevaert), and which hoped to find an answer to everything, seem to be falling like a house of cards. Uncertainty and not knowing are good, and we need to become used to them because they are part of our very nature, although we weren't perhaps aware of it and neither did we want to acknowledge it. The backdrop against which we form our projections and dreams had become centred (and perhaps still is) on success, precise knowledge, and certainty. It is from this point, from the perspective of quarantine in the global South, that I would like to reflect upon a little theology in the midst of / about times of uncertainty. I say "little", because I don't claim to have the answers to all the questions, and nor will I try at any time to present this as a finished work. It is just a little attempt to discuss some ideas that have arisen during the pandemic. It is "theological" because it aims to look at reality through the lens of the intelligence of faith, from the point of view of believing in the God of surprises (Gerard Hughes). "In the midst of / about times of uncertainty", gives it a geographical, spiritual and psychological setting. This is accompanied by three very simple themes for reflection, mere watercolour creations that I have been able to reflect upon during these days of quarantine.

Desire

This “not knowing” indicates a void, an open space which we desire to fill, give answers to, or find a way out from. In these current times, we have found ourselves with a wish list of essentials that need to be fulfilled: a desire to be able to go out again, to meet with those we know, to return to our classrooms, to visit our sick, to be able to give a dignified funeral to our deceased, to leave the hospital in which we are hooked up to machines that help us with our breathing. We desire places, moments, people. We wish for that which we do not have. Desire is the companion of uncertainty, given that we don’t even realise when we have the very thing we desired. Controlling events around us and our time is something that we cannot provide a specific or set answer to. Today our response is: “I don’t know”. Perhaps using the metaphor of a compass will help us think about that first moment of desire. A compass shows the way and requires the lost person or the searcher to continually move until they find due north, which will then allow them to find their way and no longer be lost. We are constantly seeking this same north, the answers to the void, the lockdown, health, work...

But it is more than this. Theology should also be experienced and reflected upon (and be understood) in terms of uncertainty. The desire for God, the need to understand the mysterious reality of the sacred and to try and understand reality from a theological perspective are at the foundation of this desire. The English theologian David Pailin in a thought-provoking work entitled *The anthropological character of theology* has a chapter dedicated to “tentativeness in theological understanding”. In it, he points out that during the seventies, a tendency arose in which theological prudence was the main element which marked out the development of the discipline. The authors, says Pailin, preferred (as should we) to speak of “fragments”, “images”, “navigational charts” and to “candidly confess our perplexities”. Theology in the midst of and on the subject of uncertainty should always exercise prudence at the moment of wanting to understand and explain the sacred, the Mystery that is God. I always liked the expression used by Adolphe Gesché in his dogmatic theological collection *Dieu pour penser*, when he says that in speaking about God, we can only babble. Babbling indicates the lack of coherency found in the words of little children. It is an attempt to be able to say something, but one which always “falls short” in the expressions we use. Thus arises the question: why can we not claim to be able to capture something of this Mystery? Pailin states: because the ultimate object is Mystery, in other words, the “unknown”, the mystery which “is” but exists in a relationship characterised by distance-absence, and because God (Mystery) causes tension and unrest (desire) in the human being. Our words remain (or should remain) inadequate. Faith is not information; it is a transformation into uncertainty.

This “tension” is striking because it is directly linked with desire. Here I recall the work of Byung-Chul Han when he distinguishes pornography from what we understand of Eros. Pornography is the opposite of uncertainty, given that it is viewed in a direct line of sight which goes from the observer to what is being observed. There is no mediator, there are no fantasies, there is no uncertainty. In contrast, says Han, Eros is the space in which the human being, through this tension and distance, is able to use their imagination and wonder what something will be like, or who might be behind the veil of unknowing. That is the grace of uncertainty and how uncertainty can represent grace. God has no set place. God inhabits the unknown place, the Eros, and not what we could describe as pornographic reality. God generates uncertainty and the human being, who lives in uncertainty, seeks (or desires) to make a connection with Him and answer their questions arising from this need to know God. For this reason, and in the words of Pailin: “Theologians who do not admit the tentativeness of their understanding comically presume to freeze the creating Creator. They treat God as dead”.

Recognition

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Another element which Pailin outlines in his argument has to do with avoiding giving quick answers to questions on the meaning of reality. As human beings, believers, theologians, we should as individuals recognise the changing reality of the present moment. We wish to recognise God, we desire to be able to meet with those we know again, family and friends. We desire to return to our familiar “normality” (in quotation marks, of course). On this second point, I am led to reflect upon the marvellous text of Exodus 3:13-14, the vocation of Moses and the revelation of the divine name of Yahweh. Maybe this account can help us think about the meaning of recognition, and the link it has with uncertainty. It states:

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” (Ex 3,13-14).

The revelation of the divine name is, in effect, a concealment of that same name. The identity of God, that is, God’s permanent presence in the past, present and future of creation cannot be reduced to one single name. This is very relevant to our understanding of reality, both linguistic and otherwise, since in relation to language, the creatures or things we name become somehow “reduced” or limited by that single linguistic category. For example: saying this

IS a vase, means that the vase is not a watch, for example. The fact that God revealed Himself as “I am who am” (I was that which I am and that which I will be), indicates that our words to describe Him remain tentative. We should also ask ourselves: does there always have to be an answer to everything or does “I don’t know” possess its own theological and human value?

Recognising this can also be connected to so-called “apophatic theology” or negative theology. At times of greatest uncertainty, we can also recognise signs of great mercy. In these days of profound unknowing about what will happen in the future, signs of humanity, of compassion and mutual help have spontaneously emerged, free from banners or political, religious or economic persuasions. In Chile, where I am writing from, the most vulnerable sectors of cities organised what are known as “grassroots movements”, in other words, offering the free gift of food for anyone that is hungry. In our homes, we saw examples of helping others, as well as the morality of caring for others, accompanying them, listening to them and meeting them. This can be a way of living out the meaning of uncertainty and recognising that times of uncertainty have meaning. The little spark of meaning can show itself in the darkest void. By taking a step back and recognising the true scope of reality, we can rediscover the different forms of humanisation, which this time of uncertainty has allowed to develop, by gifting us with a space where true humanity can flourish.

Evening

At times of great disturbance we seek peace and rest. I think the evening can be a metaphor for recognising this same desire to calm the worries which trouble us. Evening is the intersection between day and night, it is a halfway point, it is the time when home offers welcome at the end of a long day’s journey. It was in the evening when the events of Emmaus occurred (Cf. Lk 24:29). The table is made ready, blessings are said, the events of the day are discussed. As Mario Benedetti said in his composition *Choosing my landscape*: “Oh if I could choose my landscape, I would choose, would steal this street, this recently darkened street in which I am cruelly revived and of which I know with strict nostalgia the numbers and the names of its seventy trees”.

The trees, the streets, the faces, life in the evening time takes on a new tone, always magical, seductive, theological. John of the Cross said that in the evening of our life we will be judged on love. What colours do our evenings take on? What shadows and shapes can be made out in this twilight for us? What spiritual connections wait in this evening’s embrace of uncertainty concerning our future? We are looking out for the approaching night, which has already arrived for so many, through meaninglessness, death, illness, unem-

ployment, distance, stress. We are looking out for the night, but we also desire to look ahead to the approaching light of dawn. We see evening approaching, and in it we recognise the faces and stories of so many of our evenings. We see evening approaching, and yet our hearts resound with hope that the day which follows this night will be better for each one of us.

POST-TRAUMATIC AND POST-CONFINEMENT STRESS. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS AND THE CALL TO WORK TOGETHER

June 25, 2020, by Víctor Hernández¹⁸

The psychological effects of the confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been pointed out by the most recent investigations in the field of mental health¹⁹: anxiety, depression, changes in sleep patterns, drug or alcohol abuse, changes in perception and difficulties in concentration, a feeling of isolation and loneliness, low motivation and negativism. Besides all the effects that are properties of the stress caused by confinement, there has been registered an increase in sexual violence²⁰ and in a negative outlook with regard to aging and loneliness.²¹

Such effects will not just disappear when the confinement is over, but rather it is highly probable that we will see the appearance of a whole gamut of symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress: episodes of anxiety or states of angst of greater or lesser intensity, depressions of various types, psychosomatic symptoms, signs of phobias which make it difficult to return to “normal” life, and in general difficulties in reconfiguring a sense of projecting into the future.

The COVID-19 crisis has provided the occasion to meditate about the society of which we form a part. The work stoppage imposed by the confinement measures which were taken has offered a certain perspective from which it has been possible to recognize the priority of health and the care for life. But our concepts of *health* and *life* are also mediated by medical technologies and by health measures, so that our perceptions of health and sickness, or of health and death, are conditioned even more upon those technologies. Thus, a new perception about individual wellbeing is built around the need for distancing which identifies the other person as a danger for contagion and its fearsome consequences.

Just so that there are no misunderstandings. I am not saying that we should reject measures taken for health reasons – which on the other hand, and as said by the Anglo-Saxons, are mandatory – but that we might be capable of analyzing their effects on our perception of other people and on our notion of health. Because those effects touch on what we call psychological life: recognition in the look of others, the expression of affection shown through the body, the rituals of getting together and celebration, the rites of passage and farewell, the

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19. Among other resources, the following readings are recommended:

[Perceptions of an Insufficient Government Response at the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic are Associated with Lower Mental Well-Being \[Survey of 58 countries and some 100.000 people surveyed\]](#) (April, 2020).

[Psychiatry in the Aftermath of COVID-19](#) (April, 2020): *Revista de Psiquiatría y Salud Mental. Epidemic of COVID-19 in China and Associated Psychological Problems* (June, 2020).

[Multidisciplinary Research Priorities for the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call for Action for Mental Health Science](#) (June, 2020).

[Psychological Effects of the Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic.](#)

[COVID-19: Impact of Lock-down on Mental Health and Tips to Overcome](#) (April, 2020).

20. Cf. [The Pandemic Paradox: The Consequences of COVID-19 on Domestic Violence](#) (April, 2020).

21. Cf. [“We Are Staying at Home”. Association of Self-perceptions of Aging, Personal and Family Resources, and Loneliness with Psychological Distress during the Lock-Down Period of COVID-19](#), *Journal of Gerontology* (April, 2020).

humanization of shared spaces to live in them without phobias or threats. This is what is suspended or limited, by way of exception, by the biopolitical measures that we are obliged to obey.

In other words, there is a dimension of health which is personal and collective psychological health that is sacrificed in the interest of containing the pandemic, in order to avoid the greatest possible number of deaths. Saying it another way, the measures taken by way of exception impose on us the priority of survival of the population at the price of “endangering their psychological life”, if I can be permitted the expression.

Therefore, the thing that is also left dangling, what is on the margin or what is even suppressed is the thing that is necessary to name and which requires all one’s strength and psychological effort. How can one’s health include the goal of emotional safe havens in order to go out to meet other people? How can we overcome anxiety by patient listening and by building relationships? How do we reconcile ourselves in the midst of threats and fear-inducing ghosts? How do we explain to each other the pain experienced and the anxiety of almost 100 days of confinement?

And the worst thing that we can do is suppose that the effects of post-traumatic stress will disappear with time like turning a page. That is not the case. There is nothing more fallacious than supposing that time heals everything. That never happens. Not in the case of the psyche. It is now a long time since Freud spoke to us about the return of what has been repressed in the repetition or the frequent recurrence of symptoms.

So, the work that awaits us is not going to be confined to that of mental health specialists. That is the partial vision of the medical perspective on health, that only the experts should be in charge of it. It is not like that. Or at least not exclusively.

It is precisely an experience like the one we have just had of living through the COVID-19 crisis which is the occasion to return to the vocation of common labor. All of us are called to contribute to the multiple tasks involved in assistance, support, sustaining and, above all, in reconstructing the sense of health and life that is not reduced to a medico-biological vision (which has been the fundamental tool in the fight against the pandemic). This labor in common, this vocation to joint action in all the groups to which we belong, supposes at the least the following aspects.

- Synergy and cooperation beyond mere competencies or self-aggrandizement. In the same way that in the field of mental health it is fundamental to have interdisciplinary cooperation, so it is equally fundamental that each area of action be capable of recognizing its interdependency. Each function has been fundamental in the implementation of the measures of

containment of the virus (as has been seen among the medical personnel, or among the cleaning staff, to offer some examples). But this interdependence will be even more important in the future, both in the short and medium term. It requires abandoning all self-aggrandizement and avoiding all practical reductionism, because it is the time for collaboration and synergy.

- Community and sense of community. Now more than ever it is necessary to give value to the social fabric beginning with the networks and communitarian practices: churches and faith communities, associations, groups that create alternative space for life in the neighborhoods. Also, it becomes fundamental that the virtual networks can conceive of themselves as networks with a sense of community and that into the practices of telecommunication there can be integrated objectives that allow a certain sense of group.
- The arts. Artistic practices have been fundamental in helping to get through the time of confinement. It has been moving and very valuable how many artists and many fans of the arts have shared their art from balconies and on social networks. Art also will be a fundamental tool in expressing and redefining the whole experience of “collective trauma” and therefore it will be of equal importance for groups, communities, institutions and for society in general to facilitate the work of artists.
- Practices of spirituality. Both in critical situations (sickness, moments of crisis, death) as in the parts of the life cycle and in rites of passage, practices of spirituality fulfill a very important role. These may include specifically religious practices (prayer, meditation, singing, liturgical celebrations, sacred texts, corporal devotional practices) or they might be non-religious (methods of reflection and of meditation, searching for a sense of emptying out the mind or simply practices to achieve inner silence). It is important that such practices and rituals be considered a valuable element of accompaniment in crisis situations (the practice of a hospital chaplaincy, interreligious and also non-confessional, is a good example) as well as the processing of post-traumatic stress.

Finally, it has to be admitted that the vocation of a joint work (adopting synergies, empowering the communitarian and art, accepting the value of practices of spirituality) is nothing easy. In fact, we should assume that our (neoliberal) society is more supportive of a “non-cooperative I” (as has been expressed by Richard Sennett²²) and that the COVID-19 crisis will not eliminate per se the fears and prejudices, nor laziness nor the tendency toward social withdrawal.

Working together, in groups, should be understood as a call, as a vocation in the classic sense, as a proposal, as a voice that is coming from the future, in

22. Cf. Richard SENNETT (2012). *Juntos. Rituales, placeres y política de cooperación*, Madrid: Anagrama.

the way of a requirement. And that voice tells us that we are called to think together, to think in a new way about life and health, relationships and work, the limits that are put on us by things we can't control, sickness and grief. To think about what can be named and what cannot be named, as the psychoanalyst Maud Mannoni said when reflecting on old age and death.²³ And to think about all of it as a collective action, as working in common, as interdependence that reminds us that we are not isolated or alone, that we are the other for whom someone in the distance is looking and upon whom they know that they can count.

23. Maud MANNONI (1992).
*Lo nombrado y lo
innombrable. La última
palabra de la vida*, Buenos
Aires: Nueva Visión.

RESPONSES OF LABOR TO THE CRISIS

June 30, 2020, by Eduardo Rojo²⁴

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I greatly doubt, and I think that all of my readers would share my point of view, that shortly before the promulgation of the state of alarm by the Council of Ministers on March 14 and which on March 11 the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 to be a pandemic, we would have been aware of the radical change that it would mean for our lives. Of course, I am equally sure that the Spanish government was unaware of the radical change that it would mean for its agenda for workers in the coming months.

The crisis has a marked social character. What do I mean by that? That although the virus that we don't see (worthy of a movie by Stephen King or in earlier times, of Alfred Hitchcock) can affect any person, it affects to a greater degree working people, those whose work is considered essential activity, and so therefore they have to continue to go in person to their work places. For that reason, the pandemic to a greater extent has touched the neighborhoods and the districts where a large part of that population is concentrated. I am referring, then, to those people who continue working, those who continue to move about every day on the train, bus, subway or in their own cars to reach their places of work because we have not yet found the possibility of doing that kind of work by "non-human" means. This is to say that many workers whom studies about the future of work consider "expendable", or at least substitutable in large part by the application of technology, have become totally necessary in order to maintain at least a minimal social cohesion in these climactic moments of the crisis. And besides (and here the "futurists of work" have hit their mark), what have acquired a lot more importance in these moments are tasks, activities, works of caring for those who most need it because of their physical state. These works can be paid or not, in more or less precarious conditions, done by persons in a regular or irregular situation, of Spanish nationality or foreign.

The political decisions which have been adopted by the Spanish government have placed the labor and social security rules, and more concretely the right to work and to social security, in the "eye of the hurricane" of the political and social debate, analysis and critique.

Totally differentiated from how the crisis in labor reform of 2012 was faced by the government of the Popular Party, it seems to me that on this occasion the right to work and to social security has not been by any means a "byprod-

uct” of the economic decisions that were adopted, but rather has played a relevant and primary role in the search for solutions to the crisis, going hand in hand with the economic decisions.

In the reform of 2012, the emphasis was placed on a greater unilateral flexibility on the part of the employer to modify working conditions and on a greater juridical freedom to proceed to group lay-offs without on the other hand adopting measures to protect economically those who were affected by those decisions. In the crisis of 2020, the measures (with greater or lesser accuracy in their formulation and application, but there will be time to analyze that in detail) have tended to look for methods of suspension, not extinction, of work relationships, as well as seeking methods of negotiated flexibility in the organization of work. And all of this while being blanketed economically by unemployment and a reconfiguration of the concept of *work-related accident* or of assimilation of certain assumptions, because of the gravity of the health situation that has affected and continues to affect thousands of workers.

The measures adopted in Spain are similar to those adopted in other countries both in Europe and on other continents, as is seen in the periodic bulletins of the ILO and the documentation prepared for the world summit on work that will take place at the beginning of July.

As of the date of the writing of this article, during 2020 there have been enacted 24 royal decree laws and from number 6 (enacted on March 10) to number 24 (hot off the presses since it was approved on the 26th and it was published and went into force on the 27th) they all included economic, social and/or work-related measures as a consequence of COVID-19.

In very compact synthesis, the work-related measures are the following:

- **Maintenance of employment** by proceedings of temporary regulation of work (ERTE) by total or partial greater force and for economic, technical, organizational and production reasons (ETOP), accompanied by the exemption from employer contributions to Social Security. The negotiation between the social agents in order to come to an agreement with the Government before June 30, the sunset date of the regulations of the agents, has borne fruit and it will allow both for the maintenance of employment and the gradual recuperation of production activity.
- **Protection for unemployed persons**, both for those who work for someone else and for those who work for themselves. Maximum flexibility in the requirements for complying with the contributive payment (without the need for a minimum period on which to base an estimate unless the “spent” period counts toward future payments), very flexible regulation of payment for stopping activity on the part of self-employed persons and extraordinary payments for groups that had been previously excluded (tem-

porary contracts for a minimum duration of two months, persons who were of service in a family home [27,413 persons in this group according to official data between May 4th and 29th]).

- **Reenforced protection for safety and health at the workplace**, which supposes a radical change in the importance of such measures as physical distancing, washing of hands, the use of masks. A very complicated social and legal debate about the protection necessary for workers who are engaged in face-to-face activities, especially in the areas of health workers and that of forces and groups engaged in security.
- **The introduction of teleworking** at the speed of a Formula 1 racer, with both positive aspects (fewer layoffs, less possibility of contagion, possible better organization of work time) and those not so much, especially if the schools are closed and that affects the balance between family and work life, as, for example, the risk of becoming overloaded with work and the lack of disconnection from it. And now we have a proposed law concerning distance working, although we have to wait and desire that it is approved rapidly and that it adequately protects all those people who carry out their work digitally on a regular basis – a steadily growing number – without forgetting the importance that face-to-face activity has, along with personal contact with one’s working companions.

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There exists a relationship between this change and the configuration of a digital future if we pay attention to the important digital transformation which has taken place in the world of work. I want to highlight it because it has also been emphasized in the recent conclusions of the European Council about the configuration of the digital future of Europe. There the emphasis is on “the significant impact which the digital transformation will continue to have on the European labor market, in particular on what has been called the evolution of the demand for skills, like the progressive elimination of certain types of employment and the creation of other new ones.” For that reason it is asked of the Committee that it takes into account the policies and initiatives of the EU with regard to the labor market and social protection with a view toward achieving synergy with digital policies and initiatives.

- **Measures to facilitate the adaptation of the work day**, including permission for an unpaid reduction in activity. It is necessary to put them into action in order to avoid a deterioration in the balance of family life and work, without forgetting that women are the most affected group.
- **Special attention to avoid situations of unexpected irregularity** for the migrant labor population and their families. Authorization of permissions for residence and/or work, offer some economic help that would make possible family reunification and also some more flexible aid in requesting authorization for residency based on social rootedness.

- **Economic protection for all those family units** that find themselves below a certain level of income. The minimum living income, the star of the new social policy, should go to the largest possible number of persons living alone or units of people living together that need it. By the end of June, 74,119 family units had received payments. The reality of the crisis, and not only that brought on by COVID-19, is evidenced by the fact that from the date of the beginning of the filing of requests for aid, June 15, up to June 23 there had been presented 344,585 such requests.
- **The recovery** – something which had been forgotten in the beginning – **of the importance of a social dialog** to adopt a package of measures that would allow the facilitation of the economic recovery and the maintenance of employment.

To conclude, I reiterate a theme that I have expounded on previous occasions and that I continue to defend because I consider it fully valid. With respect to the decisions adopted that have consequences for labor, we are within the framework of an obligatory flexibility, adopted primarily for the persons working in the public sector, but also with consequences for those in the private sector. Facing this obligatory flexibility, we have to remember its time limits (the duration of the state of alarm, both in its initial period and in all of its extensions, and the recovery of normalcy) and the necessity of recovering, in all the ways possible, the flexibility that was negotiated and agreed to about working conditions.

I don't think that in a situation like the one that we are experiencing now either the world of employers or that of workers, or their representative organizations have an interest in putting obstacles up for this kind of agreement. And of course, now is the moment – and has been for some time -to see the degree of real efficacy, not merely theoretical or in an annual statement of accounts, of social responsibility on the part of employers. A flexibility agreed to by employers, but with a social dialog at a higher scale that can and should configure itself as the central axis of the “modern” labor relationship of the crisis. The higher scale means by groups of employers, municipalities, the State, Europe. The agreement about digitalization signed on June 22 by the organizations of European employers and labor unions is a very significant and international example. The flexibility should be requested with force by the highest world forum in socio-labor matters like the International Labor Organization, just as is done with the questions that are presented in debate in the next world summit, with the object of promoting “a sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full employment and production and decent work for everyone.”

If that were the case, everyone would come out as winners. Would it be possible?

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEW NORMAL: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN COOPERATING FOR DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF COVID-19

July 7, 2020, by Valeria Méndez de Vigo²⁵

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Asking ourselves about how we will get out of the crisis brought on by COVID-19 has been changed into a common situation in which the most optimistic argue that we will come out of it stronger or better, while the pessimists argue that we will come out weaker. As usually happens, the individual and collective future, even in these times of COVID-19, will depend on decisions that we make today and it is those decisions, as well as our attitudes and values, that will set the standard for how we will come out of this pandemic.

And what can the NGOs [non-governmental agencies] do to cooperate in development? How can they contribute to the decisions that are taken so that the balance leans to the side of history that is more humanistic, fraternal and exhibits more solidarity? Following are some key points:

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Read reality and take charge of it

If there has ever been a moment in which it has proven relevant to read the reality of the world, especially from the perspective of those who suffer, without doubt that moment is now. To analyze what is happening in the world from the vantage point of cooperation in development that the NGOs have – with the vision of what is happening in different countries – and to show it, is an indispensable task today. And, of course, to take charge of the reality, acting in favor of the most vulnerable persons and in function of its areas of expertise, either with humanitarian aid or in the areas of health, education, integrated development along with cooperation from the public sector, or in any other area.

Highlight the necessity to find global solutions to global problems and the interdependence of each other in the common destiny of humankind

Starting with this vision, the NGOs involved with cooperation in development can contribute to situate the pandemic as a global problem. In fact, the NGOs for decades have been talking about the need to work out global solutions to

global problems based on cooperation. We see the problems on a daily basis in areas like the climate emergency, inequality or forced migrations. Also, the pandemic has shown in a tangible way our interdependence. We will not come out of it separately or in an isolated way. We will come out of it all together, or we will not come out of it. Pope Francis has expressed this clearly: “An emergency like that of COVID-19 is defeated in the first place with the antibodies of solidarity. ... It will allow us to feel like the creators and protagonists of a common history and thus to respond as a community to so many evils that afflict millions of people around the world.”

To demonstrate and denounce the effects on the most excluded persons and groups

If the pandemic affects everyone, why then are its effects and consequences not the same for everyone? In whichever part of the world, the most vulnerable persons and communities suffer its effects with a great deal more cruelty, be they in the area of health, in the increase in poverty, in the loss of jobs and salaries, or in staying outside of the educational system, The NGOs know these situations first hand and it is important to show them and denounce the infringement of rights as well as the situations that arise in the next months.

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The data from international organizations are devastating. This is pointed out by the World Food Program of the United Nations in a recent bulletin. COVID-19 can double the number of people who suffer from a food crisis, going from 135 to 265 million in the world by the end of the year. The World Bank warned that between 71 and 100 million people could see themselves dragged into extreme poverty. As was also pointed out by the United Nations Program for Development, even when the illness has passed, “its repercussions will continue effecting the world population for years, and to a greater degree the most vulnerable.”

To take part in the debates about building a new model, another system, which places in its center the rights of persons and caring for the common home

The deepening of the inequalities, the climate emergency and the recession in the democracies, among other matters, aggravated by COVID-19, show us with more clarity than ever that the system, the model is worn out. It opens for us the possibility of returning not to the old “normal”, but of building another normal, another system, another model, in whose center is placed people and

their rights as well as the care for the environment. The NGOs have a key role in the debates to influence the public policies and to update in a global way the struggles for rights. The NGOs can open spaces or widen them in order that excluded people themselves or groups might intervene. Because it is the people at the margins who have the key to look at things from a different angle, from their own reality of inequality and exclusion, and to propose their own solutions. In these uncertain times in which clear answers do not exist, we have to dare to look at reality from the point of view of those who are excluded. They are the ones best suited to build “the new normal”.

To be the channel and connection for initiatives of citizen solidarity

In the midst of the very grave situation, there have been many initiatives of solidarity, led even by one person, by neighborhood associations, by mothers and fathers, etc., but there are still many people who would like to help others. To be able to channel that solidarity, to connect one initiative with another and to facilitate encounters can be the tasks of the NGOs in this context. The work of the NGOs can be summed up in accompanying those who suffer the most and in promoting a citizenry that is active, united in solidarity, oriented toward the common good that tips the scales to build a new world that is more just, fraternal, sustainable and in which the rights of all persons and the care of the common home can become a reality.

OSCAR MATEOS: "THE INTERSECTION OF CHANGES THAT WE ARE LIVING IS EXTRAORDINARY AND IT FORCES US TO HAVE A GREAT BOLDNESS"

July 9, 2020, by Assumpta Sendra²⁶

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Several times you have written and spoken about the change of epoch, but the current circumstances of the pandemic force this change. How do you explain it?

The idea of a change of epoch begins to take on force with the financial crisis that is produced beginning in 2008 and its confirmation that there is a series of transformations brought on by globalization (economic, political, technological, etc.) that generate new questions and dilemmas, facing which the traditional actors and answers are no longer sufficient. Perhaps the pandemic has accelerated many of the changes and the need for answers to be presented, but it is not an inflection point in that sense, but rather places us rudely in front of a mirror.

Time has been spent analyzing and evaluating this period and we ask ourselves what will the world be like after COVID-19 now that changes have been produced at all levels?

The world in which we live is a world that is broken by growing inequality at all levels, and by a climate crisis of which we are beginning to receive its principal impact and symptoms. It is a world characterized by a global feeling of unease, of societies that are living in the first person, perhaps with different particularities depending on the context, precariousness, uncertainty about life, vulnerability and fragility.

The lack of hope for the future and also the scandalous inequality dynamite the democracies which today are systems that are incapable of offering tangible improvements in all of these areas. The intersection of changes that we are living is extraordinary and forces us to have a great boldness.

Evidently, everything has been greatly shaken and it has produced a grave crisis in all sectors: economic, social, familiar, cultural, pedagogical, work-related, religious, emotional. Which area do you consider to be the most affected?

The whole world, at all levels, has been profoundly impacted. The pandemic has taken us to a situation of shared vulnerability which would have been unthinkable a few years ago. Normally, the great catastrophes or epidemics took place in countries to the south, while this crisis does not respect latitudes. Well then, the pandemic has made harshly manifest the structural inequalities that existed. The places where the most vulnerable population lives, with less access to sanitary infrastructure or with less possibilities in daily living are those places that are suffering the greatest impact. In the United States the Afro-American population has seen itself three times more affected than the white population.

In Barcelona, the impact in the most impoverished neighborhoods is greater than that in the neighborhoods with more buying power.

How will it be possible to rebuild what has been so battered down?

Many governments, including that of the European Union, are conscious that we cannot come out of this crisis with large inequalities and a fractured social structure. If that were not to happen, the scenario would be completely unsustainable and the precariousness of life and inequalities would just be sharpened. The pandemic opens a window of opportunities to create a model that places at its center the public good and the common global welfare, but it also opens the possibility of deepening certain autocratic tendencies which we have experienced. In all of the sectors it will be necessary to stop ourselves before continuing to do things as we always did, to think about what we are learning from all of this, what this crisis is saying to us and what things we need to build projects based on equality and dignity and to be respectful of the planet. The great temptation is to return to “normal” when it is “normal” that is now the problem.

Often, we have written that society was dispirited by different realities: an accelerated pace of life, great complexity. All of this brought us and takes us to an uncertainty. How do we survive?

Social nihilism is perhaps the most worrisome of the problems that we have before us. The lack of confidence in society, in its institutions, in the possibility of having a project that revolves around the common good has taken hold of a number of conversations. They say that there is no way out and that what is needed is order and a firm hand which is all reminiscent of other times. The cinema and TV series insist on presenting dystopic tales when socially what we need is a vision of the future and hopeful perspectives. We are capable of imagining ourselves as the last of humanity the day after tomorrow, but we are not capable of dreaming about a future based on hope. Survival and an exit from the pandemic call for remaking the social fabric which have been damaged by a society impregnated by individualism, hyper-consumption and digital hedonism. We should reconnect with ourselves and connect with the people that we have around us to give ourselves mutual support and also to think about the common project that we want to undertake.

How is it possible to generate new hope for a transformation with feeling and a constructive look?

We can do this by building a critical citizenry, committed to initiatives which are willing to take on the great global problems (climate crisis, global safe-havens) along with the communitarian initiatives that help to weave together society and community in a fragmented, uncertain and atomized world. They would have the capacity to reconnect with one another in the midst of a great crisis of attention to which we have been taken by screens and social networks. We must also be conscious that we must differentiate between the need to defend public and global property, fundamental rights, and opting to renounce habits of consumption, created necessities, which leave an ecological footprint which puts into danger the life of the planet. We will do this when we understand that the 15% of the planet where we are consumes 85% of the world's resources and when we recognize that this is neither ecologically viable nor ethically desirable and that supposes substantial changes in our lives and habits of consumption. Then we will have taken a giant step forward.

What do you think that we will have learned by everything we have lived through and what human values will have been recovered?

I have hope in spite of being conscious of the predominance of this social nihilism where the problem is always the others (those that don't wear a mask,

those who haven't done what they should) and where the perception is that we are headed directly into disaster and that humankind has no solution. But history is obstinate and demonstrates the opposite. If we come out of this crisis made more conscious that we live in a common global village, that our actions have impacts on the whole of the planet, and that at root we are beings who are ever more interdependent and eco-dependent, we will have accomplished a great personal and vital apprenticeship, The problem is that we have little time to resolve many problems in depth.

What should be the sextant to orient us to the road and for making decisions under the new circumstances in which we are called to live?

All of this experience should carry us into action that motivate personal, institutional and in-depth social change, but also to require courageous political decisions which in the next few years will be key.



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