Mercy Not Sacrifice: Lessons from Christianity for COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The World Health Organization announced that Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) officially a pandemic after its detection in Wuhan, China. From a religious point of view, most churches announced a suspension of all liturgical activities. Church practices have been altered in an effort to contain the virus. In this article we will enumerate the lessons applied from Christianity to behave in such pandemics.

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the COVID-19 officially a pandemic after barreling through 114 countries in three months and infecting over three million people [1]. It's comprehensible that people tend to use religion to deal with a crisis or explain the tragedy by reference to an Act of God and seeking a church to receive spiritual support and healing during such traumatic events. Nonetheless, all over the world, liturgical services are being suspended [2]. Several million worshipers have been deprived of the existential comfort of attending religious rituals in a moment of critical vagueness and confusion.

As the world exert tremendous efforts to slow the spread of coronavirus. An old debate has been reawakened in Christianity. During the Black Death epidemic, People used to organize mass gatherings for praying to God and saints to eliminate the adversity, nevertheless, mass prayers led to more contagion. The mass congregation in churches during holy mass or other liturgies will inevitably expose people to the risk of contagion from people

who are infected but not symptomatic, thus able to spread the infection without realizing it [3].

The virus could, through sneezing and airborne droplets, get on to the clothes of the priests, deacons' consequently spreading infection to the worshippers. The main risk of infection is during intinction in the holy mass. The wine is frequently shared from a chalice or by dipping the bread into wine; a practice called intinction. Churches have multiple diversities of intinction; wine could be shared from a cup or by dipping the bread into the wine. Wafers are placed into the same chalice containing wine [4].

Eastern churches use a spoon to retrieve wine from the chalice, and the common spoon isn't wiped between recipients [5]. Some argue the metaphysical properties of sacramental wine make it impossible to spread disease. Eastern Orthodox priests from Russia, Belarus, and Georgia also have argued that sacramental wine contains strong alcohol in which diseases perish. However, most medical experts reject that premise. They note that the most potent fortified wine contains no

more than 20 percent alcohol and that most wine contains around 12 percent alcohol [5].

Giving communion on the tongue could also enable the priest's hands to pass the virus from person to person [5]. The risk of infection depends on several factors, including the viral load in the communicants' saliva, the ability of the organism to withstand the antimicrobial properties of the gold/silver chalice, and the immunity of the recipient to destroy any pathogenic organism [6].

Additional practices include worshipping in large gatherings, embracing other worshippers at church services in shaking hands as a "sign of peace," the "laying on of hands" during blessings, kissing crosses and icons might be a source of infection and spreading the virus from churchgoer to another [5]. Even if churches remain open, confessionals will have to be dispensed with so that priests and penitents can stay a safe distance apart, e.g., the sanctuary could be used. Furthermore, in the circumstances of the danger of death, it is permissible to give general absolution without prior individual confession [3].

In an endeavor to slow the spread of contagion, most churches announced a suspension of all liturgical activities. St. Peter's Basilica, which is on Vatican territory, has already been closed, and the pope has canceled his two weekly appearances in public. On March 21, Egypt's Coptic Church ordered the closure of all churches and suspended ritual services, masses, and other religious activities to combat the spread of the virus. It is the first time since the Black Death of 1349 The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is closed to the public on Easter [7]. Jerusalem during Holy Week is usually crowded with thousands of Christian pilgrims from around the world walking in the footsteps of Jesus during that new cases may be seeded in and transmitted out to different countries by holy week travelers.

When the religious needs of people aren't met, they tend to look for other ways to satisfy them. The greatest fear now that worshippers would incline to hold

unauthorized services in houses. The congregation in homes and other private places, potentially smaller and more crowded than a church, which increases the risk of contagion. In a trial to meet people's needs to hear the word of God, Believers have been told to watch offerings of Sunday Mass broadcast on local TV or online. Some churches resolved to stream three services on Sundays such as Trent Vineyard Church in Nottingham, while others, like St Andrew's Church in Shifnal, Shropshire, are recording sermons and putting them on YouTube. Facebook is put to great use in posting Mass and Choral Evensong services e.g., All Saints' Church in Northampton services were viewed hundreds of times. Catholic mass is being live-streamed from several churches in the Diocese of Westminster.

Some churches will celebrate mass every day, but without a congregation, e.g., St John the Baptist Roman Catholic Cathedral in Norwich. Church practices have been altered in an effort to contain the virus e.g., some churches update their financial systems, enabling tithes and offerings through digital channels (internet banking). Churches that share collective meals should pay attention to hygiene recommendations, including the use of face masks by employees/volunteers during food preparation [3].

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