

COVID-19 in a Religious Procession

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What is COVID-19?

The coronavirus is so borrowed from the word “corōna” which mean crown in Latin, which is borrowed from the Greek word “κορώνη/korōnós”.¹ The name was given by John Almeida and David Tyrell who first observed and studied human coronaviruses². It can't be seen by the naked eye. For example, viruses are mainly beneficial to support ecosystems, and some keep living things healthy, from fungi and plants to insects and humans, but a large part of them, such as COVID-19, are harmful to humans. COVID-19 is the newest known member of a large family of coronaviruses that cause colds, influenza, pneumonia, and other respiratory illnesses. In the case of COVID-19, the principal presumption is that the virus has spread from animals to humans in a so-called wet market that was selling wild animals for human consumption³.

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1. H. G. Liddell & R. Scott, *An intermediate Greek-English lexicon*, Clarendon Press 1889.
2. D. Tyrrell, & M. Fielder, *Cold wars: The fight against the common cold*, University Press, Oxford 2002.
3. L. Su, X. Ma, et al., “The different clinical characteristics of corona virus disease cases between children and their families in China - the character of children with COVID-19”, *Emerging microbes & infections*, 9, 1 (2020), 707-713 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/22221751.2020.1744483>).

Definition of Coronavirus in Religious Terms

What Coronavirus is in Religious Terms?

It is a fundamental religious activity that in some way informs all religious responses to the Coronavirus. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar declared Coronavirus to be a cleansing. Patriarch Daniel calls the pandemic a test. Yahya Cholil Staquf and Rabbi Lazar applied the notion of a test to faith. Our spiritual direction is being tested and the pandemic is a time of growth in faith. For Imam Abdul Rauf, the goal of creation should be tested. Patriarch Daniel has a different interpretation of the test. It is a test of the intensity of love to God and other men. Love is presented as a fundamental value and that is what is tested. Understanding the rational behind the pandemic results, is a call for action. If our faith is tested, then prayer is an adequate response, whereby our faith is strengthened, and we multiply love for God and our fellow humankind. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, rejects God as the author of the matter. Welby is uncomfortable with the idea that Corona is sent from God, even for our growth, although God works for the good through the situation⁴. The Islamic State has qualified the pandemic as a ‘divine retribution’⁵.

What is the Position of COVID-19 in the Aspect of Secular Apocalypticism via Religion-Apocalypticism?

From the religion –apocalypticism– as a way of understanding COVID-19, religious fundamentalists usually associate the coronavirus with a sign of the end times or a final judgment. But apocalypses may be secular or religious. Revelation describes four horsemen who appear when the seven seals are opened. The first symbolizes Christ. The second depicts warfare and bloodshed. The third is identified with famine and the fourth is associated with pestilence and death. Some Christians claim that COVID-19 is proof that the plagues of the book of Revelation, and

4. A. Goshen-Gottstein, *Coronaspection: World religious leaders reflect on COVID-19*, Wipf and Stock Publishers 2020, p. 166)

5. C. E. Lorea, “Religious returns, ritual changes and divinations on COVID-19”, *Social Anthropology* 28, 2 (2020), 307-308 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12865>).

especially the seven Seals of Revelation 6:1-8:1, are occurring now and Jesus' return is imminent⁶. For them, the Apocalypse did indeed foretell the COVID-19 pandemic. Corona was associated with the fourth cavalry. Secular Apocalypticism is unlike religious apocalypticism where the future is determined by divine intervention; in secular apocalypticism natural events like the current COVID-19 pandemic are the cause of the impending doomsday⁷.

The Role of Religious Leaders During the COVID-19 Period

The World Health Organization considered that religious leaders and religious organizations play an important role in saving lives, health care and social services, sharing correct information, providing pastoral and spiritual support during health emergencies, defending the vulnerable, promoting useful materials, and providing reassurance to individuals in their communities. Also mentioned that religious leaders are an important part of the safety net for those at risk⁸.

Nowadays, all over the world, places of worship are being closed to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and many are asking from whom can we get real solace or hope⁹? Social distancing can leave the faithful feeling distant from God¹⁰.

6. S. Dein, K. Loewenthal et al., "COVID-19, mental health and religion: An agenda for future research", *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 23, 1 (2020), 1-9 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2020.1768725>).

7. S. Dein, "COVID-19 and the apocalypse: Religious and secular perspectives", *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, 1 (2021), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01100-w>

8. World Health Organization, *Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19: Interim guidance*, April 7, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>).

9. Lennox J., *Where is God in a coronavirus world?* The Good Book Company 2020, p. 64.

10. V. Yee, "In a pandemic, religion can be a balm and a risk", *The New York Times*, 2020, March 22 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/22/world/middleeast/coronavirus-religion.html>).

Despite significant religious, language, and cultural differences between various minority groups, they all share important socio-cultural aspects that negatively affect their ability to prevent the virus spread. An important strategy was to apply official rules in collaboration with local and religious leaders. Religious communities faced many challenges in complying with the official health instructions during the COVID-19 outbreak, as some of these instructions stood in contrast to religious rules (e.g., praying in groups). For instance, a leading authority in the ultra-orthodox Jewish community said that suspending Torah study, even for a day, would be more dangerous than contracting COVID-19. This ruling has seen many religious education institutions stay open¹¹.

Pastoral visits should be regarded as essential care, especially during times of crisis, and encourage hospital administrators across the country to clarify policies to accommodate community clergy as essential staff but to do so with caution which mitigates risks to the community and the visiting clergy¹².

Why Spiritual Leaders Should Support Healthcare Professionals?

Religion has provided explanations and responses to questions and existential questions that may arise during a pandemic. Hence, the inclusion and collaboration of spiritual leaders with health professionals are necessary to ensure holistic understanding and overcoming the stigma that can act as a barrier to achieving an optimal therapeutic outcome; we cannot deny that faith-based practices and beliefs have sometimes led to “miracles” producing significant change. Therefore, bearing in mind the substantial interference of religion upon persons and communities, we propose a model for collaboration among religious communities, health care providers, and policymakers to manage COVID-19¹³.

11. O. Slobodin & O. Cohen, “A culturally-competent approach to emergency management: What lessons can we learn from the COVID-19?”, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, 5 (2020), 470-473 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000790>).

12. D. E. Hall, “We can do better: Why pastoral care visitation to hospitals is essential, especially in times of crisis”, *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 5 (2020), 2283-2287 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01072-x>).

13. F. K. Hashmi, Q. Iqbal et al., “Religious cliché and stigma: A brief response to overlooked barriers in COVID-19 management”, *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 6

What is the Role of the Religious Leaders and the Denominational Institutions?

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted “the importance of religion in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, stressing that the words and actions of clerics affect people’s values, attitudes, behaviors, and actions”¹⁴.

There is a positive role for religious leaders and denominational institutions, as well as religious leaders and organizations involved in contributing to the collective recovery. Health care institutions sponsored by religious institutions are essential for health care interventions. Faith-based departments and organizations provide a source of religious health assets that can help meet the needs of the entire community. Religious organizations, and their leaders, can fulfill their prophetic role in calling the world out of its sinful complacency and self-centeredness by addressing the moral obligation to be of service to fellow human beings facing uncertainty, fear, or suffering¹⁵.

The African-American faith community has been instrumental in the provision of religious services by video conferences and social media sites, sending church leaders to check on the well-being of vulnerable residents, and referring residents to support services. Special services to support mental health were also activated¹⁶.

(2020), 2697-2700 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01063-y>).

14. A. Guterres, “The role of religious leaders in addressing the multiple challenges of COVID-19”, United Nations Secretary-General, May 12, 2020 (<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-05-12/remarks-role-of-religious-leaders-addressing-multiple-challenges-of-covid-19>).

15. J. Levin, “The faith community and the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak: Part of the problem or part of the solution?”, *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 5 (2020), 2215–2228 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01048-x>).

16. R. S. Sneed, K. Key, et al., “Social and psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in African-American communities: Lessons from Michigan”, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 5 (2020), 446-448 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000881>).

Association between Religiosity and COVID-19

The people's response to COVID-19 depends on their level of belief because religion still exerts a strong influence on many people's lives. The degree to which people endorse and practice religion is because it gives their life meaning. There are two kinds of religiosity: 1. intrinsic religiosity, that is the degree to which people endorse and practice religion because it endows their life with meaning, and 2. extrinsic religiosity, that is the degree to which people use religion to satisfy individual or social needs¹⁷.

In a survey given links between stress and obesity, individuals likely gained weight during the COVID-19 lockdown. Research results indicated that stress was marginally associated with weight gain and that this was moderated by intrinsic religiosity (IR). Results suggest that for some, religiosity may moderate links between stress and weight gain during times of crisis¹⁸.

As to the Intention to Vaccinate against Coronavirus Disease, there was a significant negative association between religiosity and COVID-19 vaccination intention. A study found that Religiosity was significantly and negatively associated with intention to vaccinate against COVID-19¹⁹.

Decades of research show that religious individuals use spirituality and religion to cope during times of stress and accordingly during the COVID-19 pandemic interest in religion has soared. This unsurprisingly confirms that religion is a key aspect of identity that people rely upon to cope with²⁰.

17. D. Kranz, C. Niepel, E. Botes & S. Greiff, "Religiosity predicts unreasonable coping with COVID-19", *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000395>).

18. S. Pirutinsky, A. D. Cherniak & D. H. Rosmarin, "COVID-19, religious coping, and weight change in the orthodox Jewish community", *Journal of Religion and Health* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01196-8>).

19. A. A. Olagoke, O. O. Olagoke, & A. M. Hughes, "Intention to vaccinate against the novel 2019 coronavirus disease: The role of health locus of control and religiosity", *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, 1 (2021), 65-80 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01090-9>).

20. J. D. Aten, W. R. Smith et al., "The psychological study of religion and spirituality in a disaster context: A systematic review", *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice*,

Culture of Religion in COVID-19 Pandemic

As cultural conflicts are intensifying locally and internationally in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, fine-tuned investigation of culture/religion is necessary. As we see during the COVID-19 pandemic, a proper understanding of the ceremonies of the Native Americans can help us gauge the challenges posed by social distancing to the indigenous peoples who make much use of communal, instead of private, rituals in their stress management²¹.

Religion and Health

Religion has a huge impact on an individual's health, so probably religion positively influences the immune system, hence physical health, by reducing stress: "By providing a more positive and optimistic world view, religion can improve adaptation to acute or chronic stress, improving the impact of stress on the immune system." One of the aggravating factors of respiratory infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus is precisely the weakness of the patient's immune system. Religious support can build bridges not only between patients and their beliefs but also between patients and their religious and family communities²².

Faith-based engagement in health promotion represents both spiritual and physical aspects. Religion serves as a source of hope, provided it may determine whether one engages in healthy practices in the context of illness or let things go by themselves. This hope is much needed on an emotional level and in a way it supports life during the current crisis. Religion also provides practical services that strengthen health and well-being. In today's dilemma, religion as a health promoter plays an active

and Policy 11, 6 (2019), 597–613 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000431>).

21. L. Sundararajan, R. Ting et al., "Religion, cognition, and emotion: What can automated text analysis tell us about culture?", *The Humanistic Psychologist* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000201>).

22. C. C. D. Dutra & H. S. Rocha, "Religious support as a contribution to face the effects of social isolation in mental health during the pandemic of COVID-19", *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, 1 (2021), 99-111 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01140-2>).

role in what churches, temples, and mosques accomplish and what their members accomplish²³.

A study contributed to the knowledge of the association between the meaning in life and loneliness by studying the roles of religious coping strategies as mediators in human relations during the COVID-19 pandemic and findings highlighted the need for improved positive religious coping strategies and alleviating negative coping strategies to understand why the meaning of life reduces loneliness²⁴.

As evidenced by numerous testimonies from Italian physicians, religious creeds and beliefs not only allow us to understand but also influence the meaning of many events occurring in a person's life. With such an approach, widely understood faith or spirituality is a force that helps to overcome the mental crisis as well as facilitate adaptation to the illness or associated restrictions²⁵. The COVID-19 pandemic as it has isolated people at home has increased the groups' anti-Semitic expressions online, raising concerns about more anti-Semitic attacks²⁶. Anthropologically, medical research has evolved into the new religion of 2020, with a figure like that of Christ, who is charged with saving the world through the Eucharist from this molecule in a digital blue church²⁷.

Having identified religious resources, on the basis of spiritual history, one could suggest seven simple ways, by which geriatric psychiatrists can help religious elders use their faith to relieve anxiety and protect

23. S. M. Modell & S. L. R. Kardia, "Religion as a health promoter during the 2019/2020 COVID outbreak: View from Detroit", *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 5 (2020), 2243–2255 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01052-1>).

24. M. Yildirim, M. Kızılgöçit, et al., "Meaning in life, religious coping, and loneliness during the coronavirus health crisis in Turkey", *Journal of Religion and Health* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01173-7>).

25. O. Kowalczyk, K. Roszkowski et al. (2020), Religion and faith perception in a pandemic of COVID-19, *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 6 (2020), 2671-2677 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01088-3>).

26. C. Cox, "Addressing anti-semitism in social work education", *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2020.1871155>).

27. A.-C. Bonnaire, "Raoul, social distancing and the rebellious French - A reflection on COVID-19 treatments online debates", *Social Anthropology* 28, 2 (2020), 226-227 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12859>).

themselves and others during this COVID-19 pandemic: (1) Spend time developing a deep religious faith; (2) Stay physically healthy; (3) Care for your neighbor; (4) Care for neighbors by meeting emotional needs; (5) Care for neighbors by meeting physical needs; (6) Follow by social distancing guidelines; (7) Take advantage of technology²⁸.

There have been suggested, also, some recommendations that can help maintain or enhance physical health when cooped up at home. (1) Exercise. (2) Sleep. (3) Control Weight. (4) Vitamin D. (5) Other Nutraceuticals. (6) Medications. (7) Spiritual Health. All the above are closely linked to mental and physical health and resistance to infection. Stay spiritually healthy, develop and nurture a close relationship with God, and volunteer to help family, friends, co-workers, and someone else in need (but do it remotely whenever possible without physical contact). It will improve physical health and resistance to infection while passing on the love of God to others²⁹.

COVID-19 in the Middle East

COVID-19 in Tibetan Buddhists

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tibetan Buddhists use sang rituals to cleanse the world from the new coronavirus. Recently, members of Druk Amitabha Mountain DGK Nunnery in Nepal have periodically aired live shows on Facebook. This ceremony is known in Tibetan under the name of "Nölsang" (mnol bsangs). According to the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, this ritual originates from the figure Padmasambhava, who performed this ritual to cleanse the environment of pollutants disturbing local spirits who in their perturbed states proliferated the spread of infectious diseases and other calamities. The use of the ritual smoke of Padmasambhava purified these spirits and

28. H. G. Koenig, "Ways of protecting religious older adults from the consequences of COVID-19", *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 28, 7 (2020), 776-779 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jagp.2020.04.004>).

29. H. G. Koenig, "Maintaining health and well-being by putting faith into action during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 5 (2020), 2205-2214 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01035-2>).

their dwellings, thus allowing the restoration of a state of health and prosperity among the Tibetan people. While Himalayan Buddhists now use these scented substances to ritually combat the COVID-19 coronavirus, they tap into long-standing historical traditions that invoke the power of sacred fragrances. These perceived powers include the ability to soothe the mind, travel and spread vast distances across different realms, and improve the devastation caused by pandemics. For these Buddhists, smoke serves as a cord that links networks of humans, gods, and monsters all dependent on the purifying power of blood³⁰.

COVID-19 in Hinduism Beliefs

When a (vegetarian) Hindu leader gathered several followers for a gaumutra drinking session, he explained that the virus is an avatara descended to restore the universal balance which deteriorated because of the increasing number of meat-eaters. Several Indian gurus stated that the virus is the result of collective negative karma and argued for a return to a more holistic and sattvik lifestyle³¹.

COVID-19 in Islam Beliefs

Although death-related values can be attributed to passing news on the mortality rate, speaking of religion has gradually increased while leisure-speaking and money-spacing decreased. There has also been a pattern of discussing metaphysical issues. Muslim tweeters worried about missing the holy season of Ramadan and considered the pandemic a divine punishment for the increase of sins committed throughout the world. Arab tweeters displayed more active psychological processes than any psychological category. Tweets were also overwhelmed by negative feelings and sadness. And religion appeared among the greatest psychological traits. Finally, the tweets reviewed generally conveyed concerns about general health problems³².

30. J. P. Laycock, & N. L. Mikles, *Religion, culture, and the monstrous: Of gods and monsters*, Rowman & Littlefield 2021.

31. C. E. Lorea, "Religious returns, ritual changes...", op.cit.

32. B. A. Essam & M. S. Abdo, "How do Arab tweeters perceive the COVID-19 pandemic?", *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-020-09715-6>).

COVID-19 from the new coronavirus is sweeping the Middle East and reviving religious tensions, with governments increasingly insisting on long-standing practices to combat the pandemic. The question on the minds of many Muslims in the region is: Will the religious expression, as they know it, return to its previous state after the end of the era of the new Coronavirus? Or will this new status quo be used as another rationale to marginalize religious expression considered to be too extremist or religious practices considered to be politically inappropriate³³? “In times of hardship, fear or panic”, Mr. Shaban said, “either you think, ‘how can God do this to us?’ Or you run to him for protection and for guidance, to make it all make sense”³⁴.

The Islamic religion points out multiple spiritual beliefs to handle situations of crisis and difficulties. For example, as the crisis and painful events are part of God’s wise plan in Islam, Muslim believers were encouraged to accept the difficult events and view the crisis as a test from God to reinforce one’s beliefs. On the other hand, the Islamic religion discourages people from “giving up God’s mercy” and engaging in self-injury³⁵.

How Could the Virus Situation Affect Personal Religiosity in the Long Run?

Individuals continuously evaluate the events they experience and their interactions with the environment concerning their personal goals, values, and beliefs. Individual differences in life satisfaction were positively associated with active adaptation and positive reframing and, unexpectedly, planning. Regarding the latter finding, the high levels

33. G. Abdo & A. L. Jacobs, “Are COVID-19 restrictions inflaming religious tensions?” Brookings (April 13, 2020) (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/13/are-covid-19-restrictions-inflaming-religious-tensions/>).

34. V. Yee, “In a pandemic, religion can be a balm...”, op.cit.

35. F. A. Mahamid & D. Bdier, “The association between positive religious coping, perceived stress, and depressive symptoms during the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) among a sample of adults in Palestine: Across sectional study”, *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, 1 (2021), 34-49 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01121-5>).

of insecurity associated with the pandemic may have turned future planning into an unsatisfactory experience. Individual differences in positive effects were positively related to active coping, using emotional support, and religion³⁶.

People turn to religion in times of calamities; in times of uncertainty, it is no wonder that people might turn to religion for comfort. Indeed, the history of the study of religion in psychology has focused on developing and refining the measure of the dimensions of experiential or personal beliefs, community behavior, doctrinal beliefs, or cognitive processes associated with knowledge of religious principles³⁷. Indeed, religious orientation measures the obligation to follow particular rules that define what is right and what is wrong³⁸.

Due to restrictions implemented in many countries, religious leaders are not able to hold face-to-face meetings or make visits to hospitals or homes and are prohibited from assembling their communities. Also, religious leaders are not able to conduct weddings, christenings, and many other joyful lifecycle events, which may feel like a loss and give a sense of “imbalance” in the work they are doing. In other words, failing to do what they feel morally obliged to do for that reason, religious leaders should try to maintain a strong sense of purpose. Although it is difficult to work in conditions that are far from ideal, it plays a critical role in comforting people at difficult times. For Spirituality, Self-care for religious leaders includes not only physical and mental but also spiritual aspects. This is an unprecedented situation that may be theologically challenging for some³⁹.

36. H. Zacher & C. W. Rudolph, “Individual differences and changes in subjective wellbeing during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic”, *American Psychologist* 76, 1 (2021), 50-62 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000702>).

37. D. DeFranza, M. Lindow et al., “Religion and reactance to COVID-19 mitigation guidelines”, *American Psychologist* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000717>).

38. B. Torgler, “The importance of faith: Tax morale and religiosity”, *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 61, 1 (2006), 81–109 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2004.10.007>).

39. T. Greene, M. A. P. Bloomfield & J. Billings, “Psychological trauma and moral injury in religious leaders during COVID-19”, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, S1 (2020), S143–S145 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000641>).

Further aid is that spiritual feelings are strengthened in these critical situations. Apart from any beliefs about life after death, it appears important to believe in something, since this makes the coming challenge easier both for the moribund individuals and for their relatives⁴⁰. As we can learn from the Italian Experience of Spirituality from the Coronavirus Pandemic, the spiritual skills for healthcare workers are especially important in a disaster scenario like this COVID 19 pandemic, to relief stress and psychic sufferance of the same healthcare professionals as well as of patients and their families⁴¹.

The fear of the coronavirus has driven the faithful world even closer to religion and ritual. Religion is the consolation of first resort for billions of people grappling with a pandemic⁴². After the difficult endorsement that was taken by all senior religious leaders to modify their religious rituals, governments applied stricter measures, including cancellation of worship services in holy sites and religious schools because of the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic⁴³. Churches are experiencing a reduction of contributions because only a few are attending services while people are still engaging in spiritual practices individually or with their families. The inability to gather in the community has been very difficult for many⁴⁴. Warnings to curb the spread of religious congregations have undermined religious freedom⁴⁵.

40. Ó. Fernández, & M. González-González, “The dead with no wake, grieving with no closure: Illness and death in the days of coronavirus in Spain”, *Journal of Religion and Health* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01078-5>).

41. F. Chirico & G. Nucera, “An Italian experience of spirituality from the coronavirus pandemic”, *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, 5 (2020), 2193-2195 (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01036-1>).

42. V. Yee, “In a pandemic, religion can be a balm and a risk”, *The New York Times*, 2020, March 22 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/22/world/middleeast/coronavirus-religion.html>).

43. D. Burke, “The great shutdown 2020: What churches, mosques and temples are doing to fight the spread of coronavirus”, CNN, March 14, 2020, (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/14/world/churches-mosques-temples-coronavirus-spread/index.html>).

44. E. A. Dombo, “Introduction”, *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 39, 2 (2020), 117-118 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2020.1759950>).

45. D. DeFranza, M. Lindow et al., “Religion and reactance to COVID-19 mitigation guidelines”, *American Psychologist* (2020) (<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000717>).

Even though you cannot congregate due to physical distancing rules, there are many ways to lift your spirits right now, says Thomas Plante, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Santa Clara University: Religion has been helping people get through hard times for thousands of years, read the Psalms and you will see that it is all about people turning to God during troubled times⁴⁶.

Ministry Brands' national surveys show that 60% of respondents believe that the reduction of contributions is one of the top challenges their church faces. This was especially notable among Catholic churches, since 67% expressed concerns about reducing donations. In response to these concerns, there is now an increased use of online donations among ecclesial communities of all sizes, on the whole. As church leaders have confronted the financial challenges sparked by COVID-19, they sought ways to maintain in-person worship. They also seize new opportunities to use digital technology and innovations to communicate and keep in touch with church members⁴⁷. Because of the pandemic, the modes of worship have been altered and it depends on the person to find whether this is good for him or not. Some will get used to it and others will find it very difficult. The constant shutdown of places of worship for a long time for certain parishes, makes believers feeling far away from God and it can hurt many people's mental stability. For some, the Mass is one of the few things they have in their lives, and being deprived of it for a long time may give the impression that it was. For some, the pandemic may stand as an excuse to take a step back from their faith. COVID is testing us to see if we will strengthen our relationship with God during difficult times or turn away from him and keep going through life without his strong guidance⁴⁸.

46. B. Goodman, "Faith in a time of crisis: Psychologists' research shows why some people can find peace during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others may be struggling with their faith", *American Psychological Association* (May 11, 2020) (<https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/faith-crisis>).

47. P. O'Donnell, "Ministry brands releases new survey data showing the impact of COVID-19 on churches", *Ministry Brands*, October 21, 2020 (<https://www.ministrybrands.com/blog/ministry-brands-releases-new-survey-data-showing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-churches/>).

48. J. Venneman, "How COVID-19 impacts our faith", *The Mirror*, November 23, 2020 (<https://desmetmirror.com/9230/editorials/how-covid-19-impacts-our-faith-2/>).

The American analytics and advice firm *Gallup* said that the prohibition of face-to-face worship is “one of the most severe sudden interruptions of religious beliefs in American history”⁴⁹. 57% of Americans report that they have watched religious services online or on TV instead of attending them in person. At the same time, four-in-ten regular worshippers appear to have replaced in-person attendance with virtual worship (saying that they have been attending less often but watching online instead)⁵⁰. Some of America’s largest churches will have no believers on their doorstep this Sunday amidst public closures because of the coronavirus outbreak⁵¹.

In the early weeks of the pandemic, leaders of major religions and faiths called on their followers to maintain social distancing to help those in need, avoid leaving homes and participate in services and prayers via mass media, primarily Internet (social media) and television. A lot of projects related to religious and cultural events in churches have been reduced to zero. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the largest Catholic churches (but also of other religions) in Europe encouraged pilgrims to increase their participation in online services and prayers and to virtually make a spiritual pilgrimage. The use of the mass media (mainly television and social media) in the pilgrimage ministry will be an important factor to deepen the bond between a pilgrim and a church during the coronavirus era. Religious celebrations and events in churches or holy places (e.g. giving blessings to pilgrims in many languages) were broadcasted online⁵².

49. F. Newport, “Religion and the COVID-19 Virus in the U.S.”, *News Gallup*, April 6, 2020 (<https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/307619/religion-covid-virus.aspx>).

50. J. Horowitz, R. Igielnik, & T. Ardit, “Most Americans say coronavirus outbreak has impacted their lives”, *Pew Research*, March 30, 2020 (https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2020/03/PSDT_03.30.20_W64-COVID-19_Personal-impact-FULL-REPORT.pdf).

51. C. Parke, “Churches cancel Sunday service, move online amid coronavirus outbreak”, *Fox News*, March 13, 2020 (<https://www.foxnews.com/us/coronavirus-update-church-sunday-service-online>).

52. F. Mróz, “The impact of COVID-19 on pilgrimages and religious tourism in Europe during the first six months of the pandemic”, *Journal of Religion and Health* (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01201-0>).

The fabric of gatherings, the sense of unity, the sense of the congregation, the ritual Praxis of the pious bodies have changed dramatically beyond sectarian boundaries. Some gatherings were digital, live-streaming features, broadcast rituals, offering baptism on Zoom, confessions via Skype⁵³.

Ritual Disruption: “The loss of ritual disrupts the process of closure”. The loss of ability to hold in-person funerals and Sunday services was noted, although all understood the need for physical distancing. Concerns were expressed about spiritual loss and disintegration of congregations. The pastors’ video presentations not only provided accurate information about COVID-19 but described their evolving role as advocates. Because the two public health official video contributors were church members, they were able to effectively blend the spiritual public health messaging. For example, when asked about the vulnerability of churches during COVID-19, an official referred to the song and spirited worship as super spreading activities. This explanation gave the pastors a specific cultural tool to use with those who refused to stop their in-church worship services⁵⁴.

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to a high level of religious attendance⁵⁵. Thousands of Jews pray at the Western Wall, with the view to end the COVID-19 outbreak. “We are committed to every person”, said Rabbi Eliyahu⁵⁶. Most religious beliefs posted prayers for COVID-19 on Internet pages to urge people to pray⁵⁷.

53. C. E. Lorea, “Religious returns, ritual changes...”, op.cit.

54. F. Thompkins et al., “A culturally specific mental health and spirituality approach for African Americans facing the COVID-19 pandemic”, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 5 (2020), 455–456 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000841>).

55. A. R. Chow, “‘Come as you are in the family car.’ Drive-in church services are taking off during the coronavirus pandemic”, *Time Magazine*, March 28, 2020 (<https://time.com/5811387/drive-in-church-coronavirus/>).

56. A.S. Staff, Thousands to pray at Western Wall for end to COVID-19 epidemic, *Israel National News*, February 15, 2020 (<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/276027>).

57. (J. E. M. Rueda, A. Chama et al., Prayers in a time of coronavirus, *Cafod* (2020) (<https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Prayer-resources/Coronavirus-prayers>).

The Tyranny of Popular Beliefs in dealing with the Emerging Epidemic

Fear is the chasm between our prayer and its answer, and faith is the bridge across it⁵⁸. The primary purpose of the sound of faith is to appease the original fear of all the people and reassure them that if they die, they, he will win another life. Our mind tricks us and should not be fully trusted. In our brain is a special area of storytelling, which helps us to give meaning to strange phenomena. We will not stop telling stories to explain the world, despite the progress of science, because we simply do not possess the physiological ability to understand and perceive all information and data and see reality in all its aspects⁵⁹. Too many negative emotions, it will hurt morale or cause social panic. Therefore, we should recognize and avoid them as much as possible. False cognition makes the person doubt himself or herself and lose his or her value, which leads to moral injury⁶⁰.

Intense anxiety connected with obsessions may, for a time, completely obscure behavior the meaninglessness of these obsessions⁶¹. Many people experienced obsessive behaviour like OCD during the pandemic of COVID-19⁶².

58. S. J. A. Rogers, "Good Housekeeping 'Where one is left alone, holding only a shining sword'", *International Magazine Company* 105 (1937), pp. 59-60.

59. A. Moukheiber, *Votre cerveau vous joue des tours*, Allary editions, 2019.

60. A. K. M. Mohsin, L. Hongzhen et al., "Analysis of the causes of moral injury in the outbreak of 2019-nCoV.", *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, S1 (2020), S162–S164 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000720>).

61. E. Nahmias, T. W. Polger & W. Zhao, *The natural method: Essays on mind, ethics, and self in honor of Owen Flanagan*, MIT Press, 2020, pp. 56-57.

62. A. Jassi, K. Shahriyarmolki et al., "OCD and COVID-19: A new frontier", *The Cognitive Behaviour Therapist* 13 (2020) E27 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1754470x20000318>).

The Mystery of Eucharist (Holy Communion) in the Church and Coronavirus Infection

“Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs.”⁶³. “So”, Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you”⁶⁴. Those religious rituals known as the Mass or Eucharist require Orthodox Christians to take the Communion Eucharist with the same spoon, while Catholic Christians consume Communion Eucharist directly from the priest’s hand.

The communion spoon (or *κοχλιάριον*/Kochliáριον) in Greek is a small, silver or gold spoon with a cross at the end from the handle, used in the Byzantine rite for the offer of the Holy Communion from the chalice to the believers. The communion spoon appeared in the Byzantine liturgical rite from the 7th century⁶⁵. In Eastern Christianity it is a liturgical implement used to distribute Holy Communion to the laity during the Divine Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church and those Eastern Catholic Churches which follow the Byzantine Rite. Several researchers believe that was first mentioned at the Council of Constantinople in 861⁶⁶.

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Orthodox Church has been in an existential crisis. The situation has called into question our traditions and even our reception of Holy Communion. One of the points of disagreement that has arisen concerns how Holy Communion is distributed to the faithful from the common cup utilizing a common spoon. In response to the present deadly pandemic, three local Churches have already instituted changes in the way Holy Communion is distributed⁶⁷. Likewise, in Catholic Church has changed the way the Eucharist is given.

63. National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1989, *Isaiah* 6, 6.

64. National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1989, *John* 6, 53.

65. J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions The Church 450-680 AD*, Crestwood 1989, p. 74.

66. R. F. Taft, “Byzantine communion spoons: A review of the evidence”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1996), 209-238 (<https://doi.org/10.2307/1291745>).

67. Fr. N. Dassouras, “From one spoon to many”, *Public Orthodoxy*, August 4, 2020 (<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2020/08/04/from-one-spoon-to-many/>).

Faithful now take the host (the Holy Communion) in their hands instead of receiving it directly into their mouth⁶⁸.

The question is how many people who had contagious diseases ate from the same cup of Holy Communion. And also, the priest did not have any disease? The experience of the Church tells us that Holy Communion by the common spoon never became a vector of transmission of disease⁶⁹. Also, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said: Coronavirus is not transmitted by Holy Communion⁷⁰. Despite the appeal by the medical authorities, the faithful received the Eucharist without fear of the Coronavirus. The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece said also that: The coronavirus is not transmitted by Holy Communion⁷¹. Many priests consumed consecrated bread that had become moldy due to natural conditions. Also, each priest, after distributing the Holy communion with the spoon to the people, consumed the remaining gifts with this same spoon at the end of the liturgy; yet priests who have served in hospitals specialized in infectious diseases can tell you that no one ever got sick - from tuberculosis, AIDS, herpes, influenza, and even Ebola⁷².

Spyridon Tsitsigkos, Professor of Psychology of Religion at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, said: The question of whether you will die from Holy Communion or infect your relatives is neither only statistically nor only biochemical; for us Christians, it also depends on the degree of spirituality of each one because in practice we see e.g., that someone is infected with the virus and the other is not. And since there is no chance, let us trust Divine Providence. But beware, faith

68. K. Scanlon, "Can bishops require Communion on the hand?", *Catholic News Agency*, May 19, 2020 (<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/can-bishops-require-communion-on-the-hand-82862>).

69. Archpriest Adodin S., "Microbiology", *Pravoslavie*, March 15, 2017, (<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/101843.html>).

70. P. Chrysopoulos, "Ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew: Coronavirus not transmitted by Holy Communion", *Greek Reporter*, August 10, 2020 (<https://greekreporter.com/2020/08/10/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-coronavirus-not-transmitted-by-holy-communion/>).

71. Holy Synod: The coronavirus is not transmitted by Holy Communion, *Kathimerini*, 2020, March 9 (<https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/1068264/iera-synodos-o-koronoios-den-metadidetai-me-ti-theia-koinonia/>).

72. Fr. N. Dassouras, "From one spoon...", op.cit.

itself is a risk. Because, according to the great Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard, faith is a leap into Logic. This does not mean a blind entry into martyrdom, but personal and community responsibility and love, because, without love, even the greatest self-sacrifice becomes futile, as St. Chrysostom assures us⁷³.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Covid-19 υπό θρησκευτική έποψη

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Τὸ 84% τοῦ παγκόσμιου πληθυσμοῦ ταυτίζεται μὲ κάποια θρησκευτικὴ ὁμάδα, γεγονός πὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ θρησκευτικὴ προοπτικὴ ἔχει μεγάλο ἀντίκτυπο στὶς κοινωνίες καὶ σὲ ὀλόκληρο τὸν κόσμο. Κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς πανδημίας τοῦ COVID-19, προέκυψε μεγάλη ποικιλία μὲ διαφορετικὲς θρησκευτικὲς ἀπαντήσεις καὶ τελετουργικὲς καινοτομίες, πὸ δείχνει τὴν ἐστίαση τῆς προσοχῆς στὴν ἀναβίωση τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τῆς πνευματικότητας σὲ σχέση μὲ ἄλλες θεσμοθετημένες βιοϊατρικὲς κοσμοθεωρίες. Στὴν παροῦσα ἔρευνα ἐστιάζουμε στὸν ρόλο πὸ διαδραματίζει ἡ θρησκεία σὲ πολλὲς πτυχὲς τοῦ περιοριστικοῦ πλαισίου πὸ ἔθεσε ἡ πανδημία τοῦ COVID-19.

73. S. Tsitsigkos, Divine Eucharist and coronavirus in the context of the relationship between Theology and Science [Video Youtube, January 30, 2021 (<https://youtu.be/GcWJMX7F7tc>)].