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Are we ready? Thoughts and concerns regarding the future



The Steering Committee of the “Patriarchal Network”

The novel coronavirus has brought an overwhelming strain on public health systems throughout the world, causing physical and emotional pain to millions. It has jolted the world’s economy, bringing on poverty and sparking a global hunger crisis. It has aroused untamable fear and paranoia, causing unprecedented political, social and religious contention, together with rioting, killings, and domestic violence. What overshadows all of this is the uncertainty of when it will all end.

Epidemiologist Michael T. Osterholm and writer Mark Olshaker, in their informative article Chronicle of a Pandemic Foretold: Learning From the COVID-19 Failure—Before the Next Outbreak Arrives, published in the periodical “Foreign Affairs”, write:

“ The current crisis will eventually end, either when a vaccine is available or when enough of the global population has developed immunity (if lasting immunity is even possible), which would likely require some two-thirds of the total population to become infected. Neither of those ends will come quickly, and the human and economic costs in the meantime will be enormous. “

And they continue: “This pandemic is probably not “the Big One,” the prospect of which haunts the nightmares of epidemiologists and public health officials everywhere. The next pandemic will most likely be a novel influenza virus with the same devastating impact as the pandemic of 1918, which circled the globe two and a half times over the course of more than a year, in recurring waves, killing many more people than the brutal and bloody war that preceded it.

Examining why the [the world is] in this current crisis is thus not simply a matter of accountability or assigning blame. Just as this pandemic was in many ways foretold, the next one will be, as well. If the world doesn’t learn the right lessons from its failure to prepare and act on them with the speed, resources, and political and societal commitment they deserve, the toll next time could be considerably steeper. Terrible as it is, Covid-19 should serve as a warning of how much worse a pandemic could be—and spur the necessary action to contain an outbreak before it is again too late.”

The question we must ask is if we have learned anything from this pandemic to better minister to our fellow brothers and sisters in the future? Are we now able to better distinguish what we are as the Body of Christ when our “normal” way of existence has been disrupted? Did we take this opportunity to close the gap between Faith and the Community of Science to work together in the future? As Covid-19 continues to assault the people of the world, what are we doing to enrich our ministries in caring for those that are suffering and those that grieve from its consequences; for the medical and health care professionals and clergy; for the lonely and isolated; for those have encountered family turmoil? Other than providing food and material goods, how are we ministering to the spiritual needs of those that are now economically deprived? What have we done to deal with the religious paranoia that seems to have lorded over us during this period of fear? All these questions bring us to the final and most critical question: will we be ready to face “the Big One” that, with scientific surety, will definitely come?

These challenges are immense. In attempting to deal with them, it is natural that most people will continue to first consider their own interests, both now and in the future. But we need to realize that a world that is disunited and self-centered, with

no common purpose, is a world that will invite many problems. The reality is that if we are not ready to face the pastoral challenges that lay before us, we as a Church will be not be able contribute to the unity of Mankind that is so much needed. Thus, the question is not only if we are ready to do so. The question is: are we are willing to do so? Are we ready and willing to answer to Christ's call: "pastor my flock"?

There are no definite answers to these questions, just as there are no clear solutions to the complex problems stated above. The contradicting aspects of human nature form various kinds of inner tensions that in turn, form various perspectives in how human tragedy should and can be dealt with. In order to enhance resilience amid this pandemic and begin to look toward the future, we must begin to discuss our internal contingencies and the complexities of the problems at hand within a network of cooperation and sharing. It is only in this manner that we will be able to face the unknown and dangerous unpredictabilities that are before us.

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