

# **Uniting in the Struggle against the Pandemic of Sin: Faith as the Strategy for a New Humanity in the Covid-19 Era**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

The desire to do what is good and remain upright has been a constant struggle for man. This relative notion of who determines what is good or evil brings an unceasing divide between people, communities and countries and there seems to be no agreement. However, for the first time in history, humanity is experiencing a global unity; thanks to the common enemy, the COVID-19 we are all facing. We have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we overcome this challenge. Similarly, the subject of what constitutes sin, which is another global spiritual pandemic, is not just a question of criminal law but of morality. The church incessantly makes every effort to affect her children with a sense of the dreadfulness of sin, and our world will get better if we minimize the pandemic of sin. With all the challenges our world is facing right now, we should recall that the world had gone through tough times before. Let us learn to unite in this battle because no one does big things by themselves because if we are going to save the world from sin and future pandemics, we need to stick together.

## **Introduction**

The notion of unity, which portrays oneness, is challenging. Not only must Christians be one by an internal and transcendent union, but this coming together must also be external and noticeable, consisting in and growing out of a unity of faith and worship. With respect to faith, it may be here opposed that in none of the Christian sects is there firm unity, since all of the members are not at all times aware of the same truths to be

believed. Some give concurrence to certain truths which others know nothing of.

Here, it is essential to note the difference concerning the subjective disposition of the believer and the object of faith. The subjective disposition of the believer, however precisely the same in all, fluctuates numerically according to persons, but the objective truth to which approval is given is the same for all. There may be as many habits of faith numerically distinct as there are different persons having the habit, but it is not conceivable that there be a diversity in the objective truths of faith.

One thing however that plague Christians, is their constant struggle against sin and its effects. It offends God and causes widespread disharmony. Sin is a subject that lies at the intersections of law, criminology and theology and one that shows the need for dialogue between these disciplines. While it is known as 'offence' in law and criminology, in theology, it is known as 'sin'. The subject of what constitutes sin is not just a question of criminal law or of social hygiene, but of morality.

The idea of sin, or the morality of sin that we propose to discuss in this write up is evident in biblical law. This is because, in any given civilization, the elements of sin and the justificatory theory of criminal law that endorses their selection, is the object of social struggle. By comparison, matters are not the same in a theocracy such as ancient Israel where law is normative. Exploring sin in biblical law is to explore the dark side of life, which has lost contact with God. It is to become conversant again with the unsavory underbelly of human nature because there is no way we can discuss sin without recourse to morality.

What makes one sin worse than another, and why? This is not an academic question. In fact, the issue cuts to the heart of criminal justice policy. This means that in any discussion of the gravity of sin we must ask whose idea of sin we are talking about. In addition, who decides what sin is considering its relative and subjective perception among people.

In this write up, it is our intention to look at sin through the lens of coronavirus. What is it that makes them unique, similar

or different? Since the arrival of the coronavirus or COVID-19, humanity finds itself lost, frightened and caught off guard by an unanticipated turbulent storm<sup>1</sup>. We have grasped that we are in the same boat, all of us brittle and perplexed, but at the same time significant and needed, all of us are called to row together, each of us in need of reassuring the other. The wake of the COVID-19 makes us comprehend that we are perishing and we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we overcome this storm. If the world can come together to fight against regional or global pandemics, can she do the same against the perennial pandemic of sin? Understanding the offshoot of sin from the Christian and especially from the Catholic perspective, will give us a clearer idea of the direction we intend to sail.

#### Sin/Offence: Derivatives of Law

In any given institution or organization, the notion of sin or offence is subsumed in law. Law in the all-inclusive sense is an action about actions whereby a lawmaker makes policies on how others should act. In a more exacting sense, law is vocalized only in allusion to free beings capable of reason. That is to say, laws are the moral norms of action, binding in conscience, set up for a public, self-governing community. This is most likely the novel connotation of the word law, whence it was progressively transformed to the other kinds of law.

Aquinas' description captures this perception. From the viewpoint of the lawmaker, he wrote: "Law is an ordinance of reason for the common good made by the one who has care of the community and promulgated; from the perspective of the subject: "Law is a rule and measure of acts"<sup>2</sup> The action of the supervisor and the supervised complement one another in pursuing a common goal.

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<sup>1</sup>*UrbietOrbi*, Papal address given by Pope Francis on March 27, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>K. KNIGHT (ed.), *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.), I-II, q. 90, a. 4c; a. 1c, 2009.

Again, Kant defines law in terms of power. He uses the expression, “heteronomous decision,” whereby one person governs the conduct of another (heteros) by establishing a norm (nomos). A lawmaker does not merely instruct, he influences by communicating a policy coupled with a sanction.<sup>3</sup>

While it is true that power prop up law, law is more than sheer power. Law is power ingrained in authority<sup>4</sup>, which comes eventually from God; however, it may be mediated, for example, through the church, the state or the family. Law is an apparatus of love that moves in the direction of the common good in such a way that its sanctions also prove to be the strange work of love. These sanctions, which most times takes the form of punishment, are the effects a defaulter of the law has to face.

In this light, when one transgresses the law, such an individual has sinned. Sin is therefore an act regarded as a serious offence; or within the context of our work, as an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law. Thus, it is said that the defaulter has committed an offence or sinned against the principles of the state or society. These elements of sin, which are the objects of social struggle, are evident in biblical law.

### **Biblical Instruction on the Truth and Essential Sense of Sin**

This aspect of our work deals with sin as an individual act. Thus, it does not focus in depth on original sin or actual sin, but only alludes to them. Again, the word ‘sinners’ will be used interchangeably with Adam and Eve. The elementary genera of sin are vividly shown in Gen 3:1-24 in the story of the “fall of Adam and Eve”. God’s identified principle is consciously sullied (Gen 3:3-6). Their noticeable act of defiance reflects an interior act

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J. KOMONCHAK, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2000, p. 566.

By authority, we mean the right to decide for another in order to increase the subject’s good.

of disrespect, one driven to some extent by frustration over the restrictions enforced by God's edict, and somewhat by a longing for the instant good vowed by the enactment of the sinful act. This act of rebellion has damaging penalties for the sinners themselves (Gen 3:7) and harms their rapport with God and with each other (Gen 3:8-24). Confronted with their errant action, the sinners try to defend themselves by phony justifications (Gen 3:8-13), but these are of no help in averting the catastrophic effects of their sin (Gen 3:14-24). Adam and Eve, here epitomizing each of us, craved to substitute themselves for God in determining between good and evil. In so doing, distorting the rapport between God and humankind.

It is obvious, as perceived by Augustine and Gregory the Great that no one sins by an act he cannot avoid because sin is fulfilled in three ways, which are, by suggestion, by delight and by consent. Suggestion is occasioned by the tempter, delight is from the flesh and consent from the mind. For the serpent suggested the first offence (Gen 3:1-5), and Eve, as flesh, was delighted with it (Gen 3:6), but Adam consented, as the spirit, or mind (Gen 3:6). Going further in the narrative of Noah and the flood (Gen 6-9), the episode of sin is unmistakably visible. Among all men on earth, only Noah's family found favour with God and thus, were spared of the calamity that befell the earth due to her unbridled sin. This paved the way for a post-flood era, that is, a new era where God instructed Noah to begin a new world. The old is gone due to sin, and a new world must necessarily emerge if things are to work well. However, the flood ended but its cause (sin) still lives in our world.

The book of Exodus narrates the experience of the Israelites who were in Egypt for over four hundred and thirty years (Ex 12:40-41), and the hardship they had to endure. Through the power of God and the instrumentality of Moses, they gained freedom and moved towards the Promised Land. On several occasion during their journey, they defiled God by doing abominable things (Ex

17, 32; Num 20:1-13) thereby incurring God's wrath. Each time they defile God, Moses intercedes for them and restores their relationship with God. However, their habitual relapse into sin became a recurring decimal that plays throughout the Old Testament.

In both Genesis and Exodus, we see a pattern of man's attitude/response to sin.

- Divine Law is violated by
- An act of rebellion (sin)
- Man defends himself using specious rationalization in deciding between good and evil
- The resulting consequence is damaged relationship with God and with each other

### **Further Biblical Instruction on Sin**

The understanding of sin by our limited brainpower helps to unite man more closely to God. It moves him with a constructive anxiety, a dread of his own powers, a fright, if left to himself, of dwindling from grace. Man's unpredictable character and attitude to sin, makes it necessary to search the bible further for clues concerning the notion of sin.

The concept of sin as an adamant insurrection contrary to God's instruction is dominant throughout the Old Testament. Sin is agitation against the Lord (Num 14:9; Deut 28:15), a condescending rebuffing of God (2 Sam 12:10; Isa 1:4; 43:24; Mic 4:6). Seen from the viewpoint of divine knowledge, sin is trademarked "foolishness" (Deut 32:6; Isa 29:11; Prov 1:7). Comprehended from the angle of God's sanctity, it is acknowledged an "abomination" (Lev 16:16; 18:26; Judg 20:6). Cherished from the viewpoint of the covenant<sup>5</sup> concerning God and his people,

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<sup>5</sup>Despite the fact that it is true that as soon as the covenant is recognized, sin does violence to it, one must not finalize that sin is restricted to covenant defilements. The selected people's idolatry was sinful even before the institution of the covenant (Ezek 20:7-8), and the prophets condemned strongly the sins of pagan countries who had no exceptional covenant connection with God (Amos 1:3-2:3). See also Rom 1:18-22; 2:14-16; J. KOMONCHAK, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 954.

sin is acknowledged as an act of infidelity and adultery (Isa 24:5; 48:8; Jer 3:20; 9:1; Ezek 16:59; Hos 3:1).

The Old Testament steadily communicates that sin is entrenched in human freedom and involves an abuse of the gift of free choice (Sir 15:11-20), leaping from the “heart” of an individual, (1 Sam 16:7; Jer 4:4; Ezek 11:19; Ps 51). The complete endorsement of this Old Testament instruction is evident in Mark 7:20-23. The Old and New Testament use gorgeous expressions to refer to the actuality and evil of sin. In the Old Testament, three of the most frequently used words for sin are:

- *hāttā* (Ps 51:2, 3, 4): Literally, this means “missing the mark,” and highlights sin as an intentional rejection of God’s will.
- *pesha* (Ps 51:1, 3): signifies “rebellion,” and illustrates how in sinning, human persons reject God and his love.
- *’awōn* (Ps 51:2): This means “iniquity” or “guilt,” and denotes the way in which sin twists and distorts the sinner’s inner being.

In the above, we can see that in the Miserere of David, he identifies his sin by all three of the major Old Testament terms.

In the New Testament, the following expressions refer to sin: hamartia (Matt 12:31) and hamartēma (1 Cor 6:18), anomia (Rom 6:19), adikia (Jn 7:18), pseudos (Eph 4:25) and skotos (Lk 11:35). Hamartia and hamartēma are like the Old Testament *hāttā*. Anomia, means “lawlessness” and highlights that sin comprises a spirit of revolt and disdain for God and his law. Adikia, “injustice,” stresses that sin is a rejection of God and his sovereignty revealed in Christ; a refusal to live in the justice that God has given. Pseudos, “falsehood,” and skotos, “darkness,” disclose sin as an obstruction to the truth of God, to Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, to one’s fellow men, and to the truth

of being a human person.<sup>6</sup>

The leitmotif on sin in the Old Testament is expanded in the New Testament. By that we mean the profound comprehension of sin as separation from God, stems from the profound-comprehension in the New Testament of the loving affection that God wills to share with humanity. This loving affection of God was made visible and accomplished by sending his Son Jesus to reunite sinners with himself. As a result, sin is a rejection of the Father's love, a rejection imbedded in the heart. At its fundamental, sin is a free, self-determining choice to refuse God's offer of grace and friendship.

The Johannine and Pauline literature removed the attention of sin from individual sinful acts to sin itself. Sin is lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4), unrighteousness (1 Jn 5:17), endures in the sinner and is divergent to the truth (1 Jn 3:6-9). Paul treats sin without making allowances for anyone, as a thoughtful willful act, and as a power that has entered into human persons by their voluntary compliance to it, governing their flesh as a kind of pseudo-law (Rom 5-8).

In summary, sin in the Old Testament is described as an act of disobedience (Gen 2:16-17, 3:11; Isaiah 1:2-4; Jer 2:32); an offence against God (Num 27:14); as something loathed and chastised by God (Gen 3:14-19, 4:9-16); as injurious to the sinner (Tob 12:10); and to be atoned by penance (Ps 1:19). In the New Testament, although Paul teaches that sin is transgression of the law (Rom 2:23, 5:12-20), a bondage from which we are liberated by grace (Rom 6:16-18), an insubordination (Heb 2:2) reproved by God (Heb 10:26-31), and John refers to sin as an offence against God, and a malady of the will (Jn 12:43; 1 Jn 3:4-10); sin in the New Testament is much more the unitary actuality of one's single state of separation from God than the several actuality of an individual's many wicked deeds.

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<sup>6</sup>J. STRONG, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of the Words in the Greek New Testament*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2001, pp 15-16; J. KOMONCHAK, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 954; *The Outline Bible Five Translation: Practical Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2, Chattanooga, TN, p. 1895.

The presence of some organizations do not agree with the biblical instruction and the essential sense of sin. While some bear an apparent concordance to biblical instruction, others reject or circumvent its factual concept.

### **Organizations that Reject Sin or Twist its Factual Concept<sup>7</sup>**

Any organization, either religious or ethical, that refutes on the one hand, the reality of a personal creator and lawmaker different from and superior to his creation, or, on the other hand, refutes the actuality of free will and accountability in man, twists or rescind the true biblico-theological notion of sin. At the outset of Christianity, the Gnostics, whose principles differ, denied the existence of a personal creator. The notion of sin in the catholic sense is not enclosed in their structure. For them, sin does not exist except the sin of lack of knowledge. Thus, no obligation for amends.

**Manichaeism** with its two perpetual ideologies, good and evil, at unending war with each other, is also vicious of the proper concept of sin. All evil, and accordingly sin, is from the principle of evil. The Christian impression of God as a lawmaker is demolished. Sin is not a cognizant deliberate act of insubordination to the Divine will.

**Pantheistic** organizations, which reject the difference concerning God and His creation, make sin impossible. If man and God are one, then man is liable to no one for his acts, hence, morality is destroyed. If he is his own rule of action, as Thomas instructs, he cannot deviate from right. The recognition of God and the world by Pantheism leaves no abode for sin.

**Materialism**, which refutes the sanctity and the immortality of the soul, the presence of any spirit of any kind, and subsequently of God, does not admit sin. There is no free will; the unbending laws of motion regulate everything. Virtue and vice are worthless

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<sup>7</sup>We can read more on these various schools in, F. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. IV-VI, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1985; S. ROSEN (ed.), *The Philosopher's Handbook*, Random House Reference, New York, NY, 2000; R. AUDI (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1999.

<sup>8</sup>K. KNIGHT (ed.), *The Summa Theologica*, I:63:1

qualifications of action. Positivism places man's last end in some sensible good. His ultimate law of achievement is to pursue the maximum of pleasure. Egotism or altruism is the highest standard and benchmark of the positivistic organizations, not the eternal law of God as revealed by Him, and dictated by conscience. For the materialistic evolutionists, man is but an advanced animal, morality a product of evolution. Evolution has modernized morality, thus, sin is no more.

**Materialistic Monism**, now so extensive, teaches that there is, and can be, no free will. For this organization, one thing exists and this one being births all phenomena, thought included. Humans are but marionettes in its hands carried everywhere as it wills, and in the end, are cast back into oblivion. For them, there is no place for good and evil, a free adherence or a deliberate transgression of law. Sin in the true sense is impossible. Devoid of law, liberty, and a personal God, there is no sin.

**Kant**, having excluded all the indispensable concepts of true morality namely, liberty, the soul, God and a future life, in his "Critique of Pure Reason", tries in his "Critique of the Practical Reason" to reinstate them in the quantity in which they are essential for morality. The practical reason, he says, forces on us the awareness of law and duty. The central opinion of Kant's morality is "duty for duty's sake", not God and His law. One cannot imagine duty alone as an autonomous thing. It carries with it certain deductions, the first of which is liberty. "I ought, therefore I can", is his doctrine. Man by virtue of his practical reason has a consciousness of moral obligation. This awareness presumes three things: free will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. If not, man would not be able to accomplish his responsibilities; there would be no adequate approval for the Divine law, no recompense or chastisement in a future life. Kant's ethical scheme labours in incomprehensibilities and paradoxes and is damaging of much that concerns the Christian teaching of Christ. Individual self-esteem is the ultimate rule of man's actions. The idea of sin as divergent to God is repressed.

There must be some law to which man is subject, superior to and distinct from him, which can be complied with and contravened, before sin can enter into his acts. This law must

be the fiat of a superior, because the concepts of supremacy and subjection are correlative. This superior can be only God, who alone is the author and lord of man. The notion that God exists, can be known from His noticeable creation, and is different from His creatures, are matters of Christianity and especially of Catholic faith and teaching. Man is a created being endowed with free will. Due to the prevarication of Adam however, he has lost his prehistoric incorruptibility. While his free will remains, its powers are diminished.

### **Causes of Sin**

The far-reaching and sufficient cause of sin is the will. This is controlled in its actions by reason, and acted upon by the sensitive appetites.<sup>9</sup> It is paramount now, to make a distinction concerning the efficient cause of sin, that is, the agent executing the sinful action; and the occasions of sin, which are those other conditions, which spur to sin and as a result, implicate a danger more or less grave, for one who is wide-open to them.

Occasions of sin are outward situations, whether of things or individuals, which either because of their exceptional nature or because of the weakness common to humanity or peculiar to some person, spur or attract one to sin.<sup>10</sup>

It is imperative to recall that there is an extensive variance between the cause and the occasion of sin. The cause of sin is the obstinate human will and is intrinsic to the human composite. The occasion of sin is something extrinsic and, given the liberty of the will, cannot, aptly speaking, stand in causal relation to the act or vicious habit, which we call sin. Overall, the same

<sup>9</sup>The word appetite has a psychological connotation. It signifies "an organic need represented in consciousness by certain sensations. The appetites commonly acknowledged are those of hunger, thirst, and sex; yet the need of air, the need of exercise, and the need of sleep come under the definition." J. M. BALDWIN (ed.), "Appetite, Appetence" in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, Macmillan Company, New York, 1920, p. 360; K. KNIGHT (ed.), *The Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. viii, a. 1.

<sup>10</sup>J. DELANY (ed.), "Occasions of Sin" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11, Robert Appleton Company, New York, 1911, p.693.

responsibility that binds us to desist from sin obliges us to recoil from its occasion.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the efficient causes of sin are both interior and exterior. The foremost interior causes of sin are ignorance, infirmity or passion, and malice. Ignorance on the part of the reason, infirmity and passion on the part of the sensitive appetite, and malice on the part of the will. A sin is from certain malice when the will sins of its peculiar consensus and not under the stimulus of ignorance or passion.

The exterior causes of sin are the devil and man, who move to sin by means of suggestion, persuasion, temptation and bad example. The evil will is the source of the chaos. One sin may be the basis of another inasmuch as one sin may be intended to another as an end.

These causes of sin, if not properly put under check has dire consequences. The effect it has is that it averts man from his true last end, and deprive his soul of sanctifying grace. That is to say, this state of aversion conveys with it inevitably, the privation of grace and charity by means of which man is ordered to his supernatural end. Once more, like law in any given society that serves as a check and balance, the effect of sin is to bring about the punishment of suffering. The suffering may be meted out in this life through misfortunes, illness or temporal evils; or it may be inflicted in the life to come by the justice of God as vindictive punishment.

The comprehension of sin by our finite intellect, serves to unite man more closely to God. It stimulates him with a constructive fear, a fear of his own powers, a fear, if left to himself, of dwindling from grace; and helps him seek God's help to stand firm in the fear and love of God. Unless man comes to realize and admit that his present moral state is not that in which God created him; that his powers are weakened; that the world, the flesh, and the devil are in truth active agents fighting against him and leading him to serve them instead of God, sin cannot be understood.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>K. KNIGHT (ed.), *TheSumma Theologica*, I-II:79:2

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Jos 22:17; Isaiah 4:4; 1 Cor 6:11; K. KNIGHT (ed.), *TheSumma Theologica*, I-II. 86.

## **Focal Reason of Sin**

Sin, a voluntary act deficient in outstanding righteousness, is found as in a subject, predominantly in the will. But then again, since not only acts prompted by the will are voluntary, but also those that are stimulated by other faculties at the command of the will; sin may be found in these faculties because they are subject in their actions to the command of the will and move under its guidance.

The exterior parts of the body cannot be actual main beliefs of sin. They are mere organs, which are set in motion by the soul and they do not stimulate action.<sup>15</sup> The appetitive powers quite the reverse, can be operational ideologies of sin. They have through their close union with the will and their subordination to it, a certain nonetheless imperfect independence.<sup>16</sup> The sensual appetites have their own appropriate sensible objects to which they logically incline. Therefore, they may be close main beliefs of sin when they move inordinately divergent to the injunctions of right reason.

It is the right of intention to rule the lower faculties, and when commotion arises in the sensual part, the reason may do one of two things: either it may approve of the sensible pleasure or it may suppress and reject it. If it approves, the sin is no longer one of the sensual part of man, but of the mental power and will. If rejected, no sin can be ascribed. There can be no sin in the sensual part of man independently of the will.

The will never agrees to a sin, which is not at the same time a sin of the superior reason. The superior reason is the ultimate judge of human acts and has no commitment of pondering and determining whether the act to be executed is agreeing to civil law or the law of God.

From the aforementioned, it is clear why sin is perceived as a pandemic because it cuts across different eras and lingers on. Adam and Eve lost prehistoric incorruptibility. Their faith in God, in conjunction with their descendants, proved to be incomplete because they could not abide nor obey God's law, thus, were not

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid. I-II:74,2, ad 3um.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. I-II:56,4, ad 3um.

in accord with God in his plan. While humanity is at liberty to pursue every humangood, their responsibilities fall short of the moral uprightness it requires. Understanding what a pandemic is will help us appreciate our discussion on the struggle against sin.

### **Clarification of terms for communicable diseases**

Not all communicable diseases are identical; though they are erroneously and occasionally used interchangeably. The difference concerning the words ‘pandemic’, ‘epidemic’ and ‘endemic’, is often unclear even by health professionals for the reason that the explanation of each term is fluid and mutates as diseases become more or less widespread over time. As a result, knowing and understanding their variance is imperative.

**Epidemic:** is a disease that affects a large number of people within a community, population or region.

**Pandemic:** is an epidemic that is spread over multiple countries or continents.

**Endemic:** is something that belongs to a particular people or country.

**An outbreak:** is a greater than anticipated increase in the number of endemic cases. It can also be a single case in a new area. If it is not quickly controlled, an outbreak can become an epidemic.<sup>17</sup>

### **History of diseases caused by virus**

In the late 240s AD, a severe new illness arose; causing terror all over the Roman Empire for the next two decades. This sickness would torment and wreak havoc on the populace during winter, then ease during summer. Repeatedly, it would return the next year and sometimes the next.

Modern intellectuals are not sure precisely what this sickness was. While several proposals, including smallpox and bubonic plague were diffused, it is safe to say that the disease is a virulent influenza-like illness.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>The difference concerning the words ‘pandemic’, ‘epidemic’, ‘endemic’ and ‘outbreak’ were sourced from <http://www.intermountainhealthcare.org>, accessed on May 17, 2020 by 11:12am.

<sup>18</sup>S.BULLIVANT, Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus, Word on Fire, Park Ridge, IL, 2020, p.6.

There are nonetheless some conspicuous resemblances. At this point, we depend on the direct evidence of Cyprian, who was bishop of Carthage when the disease hit the city around 250 AD. He speaks, for example, of the attack of fevers, austere stomach indications such as diarrhea and vomiting, which afflict a momentous number of coronavirus casualties in our present era.

The plague in Cyprians' era and our present global crisis, share a link with countless other outbreaks throughout human history. This include the overwhelming costs in terms of lives and livelihoods; the anguish (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) afflicting millions, even billions, of people; and the stress and strains put on all, but particularly on those whose calling it is to serve, protect, treat, and care for others.

Dionysius of Alexandria captured our collective pain by noting that “now, indeed, everything is tears and everyone is mourning, and wailings resound daily through the city because of the multitude of the dead and dying.” In our present situation, we can painfully relate to these worrying words written almost eighteen hundred years ago.<sup>19</sup>

Pontius, who functioned as a deacon of Cyprian's in the course of the period in question, played a pivotal role in assisting the innumerable residents in Carthage who give in to the terrible plague. Even though others escaped to the rural area (in many cases, one assumes, taking the disease with them), a substantial number of Pontius' coreligionists remained behind to care for any in need, regardless of their faith. In Alexandria, for example, Dionysius reports that, “Most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly, and ministered to them continually, serving them in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

The Justinian plague (541-542AD), also known as the bubonic plague, struck in the 6th century and is projected to have claimed between 25-100 million people in the course of two centuries of reappearance, as it spread across Asia, North Africa, Arabia and Europe.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p.<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, pp <sup>6,7</sup>.

Another plague, called the ‘black death’ of 1346-1353, ravaged the world. It is the greatest fatal pandemic documented in human history, resulting in the deaths of up to 75-200 million people in Eurasia, North Africa and Europe. This plague generated religious, social and economic disruptions, with weighty effects on the development of European history.<sup>21</sup>

In 1575, a plague descended on Milan. The bishop, Charles Borromeo, hurried both to action and to prayer. Borromeo sold his own belongings to fund the relief effort and convinced many well-to-do citizens to donate openly. He organized his clergy to care, materially and spiritually, for all in need. He produced and operated hospitals and quarantine houses. Apprehensive by the growing ranks of those without a job, he created jobs for, or otherwise supported, huge numbers of laid-off workers. Though he inculcated firm social- distancing rules, he was however anxious not to relinquish his own personal interaction with the suffering.

Kyle Harper, draws informative contrasts to the global “Spanish” Flu crisis of 1918–1920 which claimed about 20-50 million lives, and the more recent outbreaks of H5N1 “avian flu” of 1956-1958 that claimed about 2 million lives.<sup>22</sup>

Specific warning signs aside, the sickness evidently flourished on close person-to-person contact, as per our own fixations with “social distancing” and “self-isolation.” Clues from other earliest sources also advocate that, while no age group was truly “safe,” those in middle and older age brackets were at least equally, if not harder hit.<sup>23</sup> At this time, another equivalent willingly dives to mind: our current coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>21</sup>We can read more on the Justinian plague and Black Death on <http://www.en.m.wikipedia.org>, accessed on May 16, 2020 by 12:40pm.

<sup>22</sup>This flu virus mainly infects birds, but can also contaminate humans. Symptoms begin within two to eight days and can appear like the common flu. This virus can carry a high mortality in humans. Some antiviral drugs, if taken within two days of symptoms, may help. See also K. HARPER, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2017, 136-144.

<sup>23</sup>S.BULLIVANT, *Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*, pp1-2.

## **Effect of Coronavirus or COVID-19**

The coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic is the crucial-worldwide health emergency of our time and the utmosttest the world has faced since World War II. From the time when it appeared in China, the virus has spread to every continent with cases increasingevery day. Countries are battling to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients through carrying out contact tracing,confining citizens and calling off large gatherings.

My recent interaction with a medical doctor and consultant microbiologist based in the United Kingdom, gave me more insight to the scientific background of the coronavirus, just to help us understand it a bit more. The coronavirus itself has been around since 1937 and it was first isolated in chickens. It infects both humans and animals. The human coronavirus was first isolated in 1960, mainly associated with symptoms of common cold. In fact, 50% of all common cold is caused by the coronavirus, therefore, most people would have had the coronavirus at some point in their lives. It was not until 2003 that coronavirus went on to cause quite severe infection, and the first infections been encountered by the coronavirus is known as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) infection. It started in China and it was traced back to bats. It infected over eight thousand people with over seven hundred deaths. That infection completely disappeared off the face of the planet in 2004 and we no longer have the SARS virus.

The second severe infection caused by the coronavirus is the Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome virus, also known as the MERS infection. It happened in the Arab peninsula and it infects people when they are exposed to infected camels or when they drink infected camel milk. Now, that infection is still on going. The mortality rate associated with that particular MERS coronavirus is high, about 35% of the people who get infected die.

Compare that with the COVID-19, which causes as at the time of this write up, only 3% mortality rate. So, the COVID-19, first declared as a global emergency by the World Health Organization in January 2020, has so far, spread across the whole

world and there is practically no country in the world right now that does not have cases of the coronavirus. Even though the mortality rate is small, it causes quite a contagious infection that it spreads quickly from one person to another within two meters through cough, sneezing and talking. Infection can also take place when one touches infected surfaces and uses that same hand to touch the face. The symptoms are numerous but we shall not focus on that and its period of incubation.

In every country it touches, the COVID-19 has the prospective to generate disturbing social, economic and political crisis that will leave profound scars. No doubt, the world is in an unfamiliar terrain with many communities now unrecognizable, cities empty as people stay indoors either by choice or government order, and people losing jobs and income daily with no way of knowing when normality will return.

This is what is frightening about the coronavirus. As at the time of this write up, there is no proven treatment for COVID-19, but there are trial or experimental drugs. Any person is susceptible but people that are mostly at risk include the elderly, patients who do not have a good immune system to fight the virus, patients who are obese, patients who have issues with their respiratory tract, the hypertensive and diabetics inclusive. As a result, no age group is exempt from contracting this virus.

### **COVID-19 and Christianity: A Synopsis**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been for innumerable individuals globally, a great and bewildering trial. As at this moment, over five million people have been infected, while over three hundred thousand people have died. These numbers represent how far it has actually spread. Available data indicate that over two hundred and ten countries in the world have recorded index cases and further infected individuals. Its impact has led to the closure of markets, movie theaters, restaurants, schools, sports, and airports. Myriad of people are self-quarantining in their homes, and the global economy is showing signs of depression.

In the midst of this predicament, Christians have faced another trial, one that is not only economic, social, or medical,

but spiritual. Either church celebrations throughout the world are suspended or they grant restricted access to particular number of persons. The suspending of Masses and closing of churches is a very serious blow to our incarnational faith, Priests and laity are feeling the heartache of it. Many personnel, healthcare and religious alike, have put their own life on the line in attending and ministering to those affected by the hazardous pathogen. Thrown into the darkness of doubt, illness, and death, and separated from the life-giving power of congregating in the church and the support of church communities, Christians worldwide are feeling, justifiably enough, quite disconsolate.

However, this might also be a time of prodigious spiritual opportunity and makeover. In the first place, the coronavirus like many calamities before it, has constrained us to confront a general truth about the nature of things, a truth that we all know in our bones but we choose, typically, to cover-up or overlook: the fundamental existence of sin and the need for a unified front to combat it. Simply put, it means that everything in our experience is unstable; it comes into existence and it passes out of existence. Though we regularly distract ourselves from accepting it, this contingency applies to each of us. Every time we get sick, we lose a loved one, or a bizarre new virus threatens the universal populace, this truth of global unity succeeds in breaking through our defenses. When we are traumatized, we seek for that which is in the long run stable, and for that final cause that is not itself contingent, namely, God.

The coronavirus has also provided numerous people in quarantine with an offer to reclusive self-examination, as almost every country in the world has gone into shutdown mode. People all of a sudden, are finding themselves with plenty of time to get out their Bible and read, and to use the seclusion and silence as an occasion for prayer. There are new prospects to take in the beauty of God's creation, or to practice real works of mercy, love, and unity, particularly for those suffering the effects of the coronavirus.

Yet the practical questions remain. The laity and clergy alike are pondering not only about the long-term effect of the crisis on their own spiritual lives, but on the various Church or-

ganizations and its assignment to evangelize. The Church finds itself once again in rough waters. Down the ages, across space and time, the boat of Peter has been beset by similar storms and it follows that everyone must contribute in one way or the other to fight this deadly disease. One thing stands out, namely, that we are in a challenging moment and that a new form of living is sprouting which demands reaction from us. Physical distancing has become a normal way to social communication. Therefore, pastors cannot physically celebrate the sacraments for and with their people. The normal thing at this time appears to be a cyber liturgy.

### **Sin and COVID-19: Different but identical**

I understand many people are scared. They say sin like COVID-19, kills our immune system, attacks our lungs, and makes it hard to breathe and it is spreading like wild fire causing havoc. Our friends and family members are going to contract sin, that is if they do not already have it. It is no doubt tragic. Not only the aged will be susceptible, but most will eventually get it; they say coronavirus is new, but no. COVID-19, like sin, has been around for centuries. Look at its history; it is just a different name, a different strain. Now, like coronavirus, it seems there is no way to contain sin, it affects everyone and it is dangerous. Everyone is on the edge, locked inside his or her home. It is obvious and we have seen it that, sin like coronavirus, spreads everywhere like an epidemic. It lives on its host internally and externally, it invades the mind, and when it mutates, it turns into hatred and blame.

Our analysis thus far concerning sin and coronavirus, shows that while they are different, they are however identical because they infect the same host, 'man'. Man has become the center stage of these two great plagues hunting him from time immemorial. While sin has been dominant and seems ever to remain, coronavirus comes intermittently in the history of humanity. The coronavirus transmission is from person to person through contact with droplets produced by cough, sneezing, talking. The transmission of sin is from person to person by either perception, thoughts, words or human influence. Coronavirus is

something we can see through the microscope; but sin is intangible. It is not a material object. It springs up in one's thoughts and most times, expressed in action. The best way to protect someone from COVID-19 is to stay away from potentially infected people by staying indoors in order to curb the spread. The best way to protect someone from sin is to stay away from the occasion of sin and from people that can lure one into sin. The words of Paul captures this succinctly when he says, "Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals" (1Cor 15:34). Having stated the above, there is no guarantee that when things come back to normal the coronavirus will not resurface. Similarly, there is no guarantee that when one overcomes sin, that sin will not reemerge in the life of the person.

If this is a war, that is, the COVID-19 war, then there has to be a common front to fight it. Although the coronavirus is an 'invisible enemy', the world now, has come together to fight this battle. As there is a race to discover a vaccine for COVID-19 and the world unites in fighting this battle, there should be also a clarion call to adopt unity of faith as the strategy for a new humanity in fighting the pandemic of sin. While it remains true that sin and COVID-19 have different nomenclature, their corresponding effects is quasi similar because they spread through multiple countries or continents. Coronavirus needs a host, that is, the human person to spread, the same is true for sin; COVID-19 affects the body whereas sin affects the soul.

The commonality of COVID-19 and sin provides novelty on how sin can be tackled. If nations are cooperating to defeat COVID-19, Christianity can learn from it in the fight against sin. The next section of our work highlights salient points to ponder, to aid us to understand and defeat this common enemy.

### **The need to struggle against sin and its consequences**

To appreciate the duties relating to the struggle against sin, it is important to comprehend that sin is a spiritual actuality that lasts. It really offends God, while causing mayhem in and beyond sinners. Diabolical oppositions, their own feebleness and the sinful world around them, make the struggle of Christians against sin still more challenging. It would be contradictory to God's

wisdom to overlook evil or to treat it as if it were good. His mercy cannot mean that he reunites sinners to himself without them overcoming their sins. Hence, the overcoming of sin, the power to win the battle is the work of God's grace.

*a. Sin is a spiritual reality that lasts*

Insofar as it streams from free choice, human activities are not simply elements of ephemeral conduct; rather, actions certainly constitute the life and self of an individual. Sin, then, is a choice opposing to what the sinner believes to be the moral truth. In every sinful choice, one makes oneself remorseful, whether one feels remorseful or not; and one remains guilty if and pending one has a real conversion of heart.

*b. Sin offends God and causes extensive difference of opinion*

Sin impedes human self-actualization and unsettles human harmony on every level. Vatican II teaches that, "often refusing to acknowledge as their source, people have disrupted not only their proper relationship to the ultimate end of the human person, but also their whole relationship to themselves, other people and all created things". However, sin overtly or covertly encroach upon God's wisdom and love, pushes away sinners from him. For those who have come into agreement with God through baptism, sin is infidelity that truly offends God inasmuch as they are against the good he wills. The widespread disharmony of sin is detectable in honest people who yearn to live uprightly but habitually identify in themselves a helplessness to temptation and a liking to sin arising from the fact that their feelings are not secondary to reason (see Rom 7:23; Gal 5:16-17; Jas 1:14-15). This experience called 'concupiscence' is the result of sin that continues even in the baptized.

*c. Spiteful enemies oppose every struggle to overcome sin*

The Church teaches that the fall of man was to some degree

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<sup>24</sup>A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Gaudium et spes*, nos. <sup>13</sup>, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, in *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Dominican Publications, <sup>1988</sup>, p. <sup>914</sup>

due to the Devil, and the Devil's persistent spiteful deed is one cause of the enormous struggle that makes up human history.<sup>25</sup> Christians do not enjoy protection from diabolical destabilization, thus, the New Testament teaches them to prepare to fight through prayer for divine help since by themselves, human beings are weaker than their diabolical oppositions (Eph 6:12; 1 Pet 5:6-10).

*d. The world conditioned by sin hinders one from following Jesus*

Sin does not only affect those directly involved but also interfere with social arrangements and practices, cultural processes and products, so that there are real structures of sin.<sup>26</sup> These structures are continuing realities shaped by sin. They exemplify the sins which shaped them and lead to further sins. Greedy choices for instance, lead to unfair financial system in which the rich throw away goods and contaminate the environs, while the poor linger in despairing need. Reckless choices about sexual activity, imaginably together with inappropriate public programme of sex education, divorce and so on, embolden a family structure in which children are deprived of the backing and support of their fathers. Granted that such sociocultural structures of sin stem only in erroneous free choices, the sins of individuals and groups, they spread far beyond the activities and circumstances that give rise to them.

Insofar as the structure of sin splits and upsets humanity, it constitutes the sinful world, and friendship toward God is ill-willed (Jas 4:4). It influences all and sundry, while the all too human tendency to fit in, inhibits Christians from following Jesus or even thinking about their personal calling (Rom 12:12).

**Faith: A new pathway**

There is no straightforward theology without faith, since Christ sent by God, is predestined to gather humanity around himself as the ground and center of its salvation. Similarly, there is no faith without theology, since God, through his son Jesus, is

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, nos. 13, 37, p. 914, 936.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, nos. 25, p. 926.

the source of the church's life and its lord. Our understanding of faith in our struggle against sin, originates from God, not from the broad-spectrum idea of a society.

In trying to understand faith, one sees that faith has to do with that which is dependable, that which gives safety, that which can be confidential. It presupposes a communication concerning that, which is assured and that which is realized. Something is commendable of faith, which does not disappoint. Faith is therefore far from intellectualistic; relatively it encompasses an existential surrender of the whole person. It has to do with the entirety of a person's life. Faith is therefore not belief in something but belief in someone. We cannot place trust in the assurance of an individual without in advance assenting to or trusting in that person's claim to such confidence.<sup>27</sup>

*a. Faith not close-minded*

When people believe in someone, to be exact, God, such belief or faith is not close-minded. Pledge to Christian faith is of utmost significance because in making an act of faith in Jesus and living according to it, one's mind is not closed; rather, one opens his mind to a whole aspect of reality that helps to repel sin. However, it is noticeable that Christians like others are occasionally close-minded. Someone of weak faith, who is susceptible to sin, is likely to be apprehensive and to lack poise. If the faith of such an individual, who is susceptible to sin, hinges profoundly on egoistic intentions, elements of truth and goodness outside the church are likely to give the impression as intimidations to be rejected rather than goods to be cherished and assimilated with one's faith to cultivate and perfect it. It suffices to say that such are deficiencies in one's subjective faith rather than features of faith itself.

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<sup>27</sup>J. KOMONCHAK, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 376.

*b. Relativism and subjectivism are not the same thing as open-mindedness*

One major factor that militates against faith concerning our coming together against sin is the fact that some contemplate Christian faith as narrow-minded merely because Christians uphold doctrines and embrace unprejudiced moral norms rather than submitting to religious indifferentism and moral subjectivism. However, every worldview and way of life commonsensically eliminates substitutes. Relativists and subjectivists also have a convinced worldview and way of life; they too discard every position unsuited with their own. True open-mindedness is not indifferentism and subjectivism, but reverence for those who hold another worldview and way of life. Open-mindedness is willingness to deduce good will in others and to put up with their conscientious manners insofar as one's own conscience permits.<sup>28</sup>

However, it is quite conceivable to be close-minded in holding that one religion is as good as another and whatever people think right in reality, is right for them. Relativists and subjectivists continually talk about courteousness and moderation, but they are invulnerable from narrow-mindedness and fanaticism. Without a doubt, they are chiefly tempted to be arbitrary and sanctimonious, specifically because they recognize neither a higher reality to which all realistic people must succumb nor an objective moral norm by which all conscientious people must examine themselves. Not capable of calling other opponents to succumb to ideologies, which any sensible person should accept, relativists and subjectivists, without doubt, will be curious to use suppression in order to succeed.

*c. Faith does not encroach on freedom*

One benefit of Christianity is that whenever we exercise our faith, we can escape from captivity to sin, and together we can escape psychological manipulation and enter into trustworthy, faithful communion because far from restraining freedom, our faith in Jesus makes us free (Jn 8:31-36).

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<sup>28</sup>Welcome to the Catholic Church on CD-ROM- Harmony Media.

Although in the past, Christians took to unwarranted intimidation and violated other's independence in the name of the gospel. Such misapplications are at odds with Jesus' instruction, and we are of no help in disseminating and sustaining faith for as Vatican II communicates, "the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once gently and with power".<sup>29</sup> While it remains true that faith does not encroach on one's freedom, it nevertheless involves responsibilities, but enforces nothing on believers. Thus, Christians are charged with the obligation as a member of the church to abide by her laws and comply with her pastors.

One who has pledged commitment to the faith of the Church but exhibits inconsistencies concerning doctrines and moral teachings should be called to order. In doing so, the pastor is to employ no pressure and blight nobody's religious freedom. Those who upon correction choose to remain free to speak and act as they think right, are requesting in actual sense for their specific group, the right and power to domineer the church's pastoral leaders on what the church is to teach and how she is to worship. Here, we will come across a zoo of lusts, a chaos of ambitions, a kindergarten of fear and a harem of fondled hatreds. It will be an accustomed terrain whose state of moral promiscuity and submissive receptivity has made us open-minded consumers, if not specialists, of vice and weirdness.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, biblical law moves us on from the acceptance of sin to the acknowledgement that human dysfunction and insensitivity is not what it means to bear the image of God

### **Role of unity in the service of faith**

Why are things in such danger of falling apart in our world today? The answer is an open secret. Every time we look at the Nigerian coat of arms, we will see that answer to this question: "Unity and Faith". The application of this motto is not

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<sup>29</sup>A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Dignitashumanae*, nos. 1, Declaration on Religious Liberty, in Vatican Council II, p. 799.

<sup>30</sup>C.S. LEWIS, *Surprised by Joy*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1955, p. 181.

restricted only to the Nigerian people, but rubs off on every individual under the face of the earth because it is difficult to preach unity when one is not offering faith. Unity and faith when admired in our struggle against sin, dictates what we ought to be, what we can be, what we should be and what we shall be. They are the rallying points: to build and unite when troubles stare at us; to regain faith when there seems to be no hope; to create peace when disharmony signals and to progress in the midst of tempestuous weather.

Regrettably, many do not take seriously to the fundamental importance of these words. The unity of the world is under threat today because many people are losing faith in national policies. Why is this happening? The answer is sad but relatively straightforward. A soldier killed in the line of duty defending the territorial sovereignty of his nation, no proper care given to the family left behind; the family lose faith. A graduate with a first class or second class upper roaming the street hunting for job. Even if he finds one, he is rejected either because of his skin colour, or asked to pay for the job he is qualified for; he or she loses faith. If you have a mother who takes her child to the hospital and must watch that child die because the government hospital is on strike. If not on strike, it has no drugs. If the drugs are available, she has to pay the full market price for treatment up front before they consider her child, then she must watch that child die on the corridor; she loses faith. When people lose faith in the nation, they take refuge in several things like tribe, drugs, sexual promiscuity etc. Simply put, they take refuge in sin.

These words, unity and faith, that many pay no attention to, are supposed to construct our basic personality and mold our roles as upholders of the population's integrity. They are to make us adequately resilient to recognize when we are feeble, and courageous enough to face our self when we are frightened.

Unity and faith instill in us to be pleased of our diversity, unassuming in our accomplishment and gentle in our triumph. These words do not imagine us to substitute subjective views for words of war, nor to seek the path of separation in the face of disconcerting trials, but to face with courage difficulties and challenges, to learn from our national difference and to master

ourselves before we strive to master. These words if frankly appreciated, generate in our hearts the sense of unity, the trustworthy expectation of what lies in the future, and the joy and motivation of our togetherness.

This period like times past, conveys painful memories with fears of an unclear future. Such doubts are first and foremost of our making because some of us have become recidivists to sin while others keep flouting government rules in the fight against COVID-19. Until we build confidence with an enthusiastic and dynamic commitment to character building, our fears of the indeterminate future will persist.

### *Unity of the Church*

The very fact that humans are structured the same way in an anatomical manner should prompt unity. Hence, in the Christian parlance, it is the belief that all the baptized live in close, vital union with Christ. They are also united to one another: "As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also the faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12)". All are one in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

In the long run, this unity will be achieved eschatologically when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). In the meantime, in its earthly journey, the militant church is in a situation of the already but not yet fully realized communion in God and with one another. The church retains the first fruits of unity but it is only the start of a definitive reality. In its earthly situation, then, the church is regarded as a duality, a dialectical structure which corresponds to its "already not yet" character.<sup>32</sup>

The basic constituent of unity is faith grounded on a covenant relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit, in which God reveals himself and his plan of salvation. Faith, then, is essential to the unity and standard of the church because all hold the same truths in its understanding of a partaking in divine life as common to all believers. The dialectical understanding of

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<sup>31</sup>A. FLANNERY (ed.), *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 7", Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in *Vatican Council II*, pp. 354-355.

<sup>32</sup>M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma: The Church, its Origin and Structure*, vol. 4, Sheed and Ward, Kansas City, 1976, pp 105-111.

the church as already given but not yet fully realized is chiefly shown in our time in the disunity of the Christian churches. Hans Küng writes: "The Church is one and therefore should be one."- This unity given to the church from the divine wits, strives to be conveyed concretely in the life of the churches. It is an eschatological imperative, which lures Christians to seek its complete, visible expression in history.<sup>33</sup>

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus won for us independence from sin. That historic era came as a great symbol of hope to humanity who had been imprisoned in the cage of sin. It came as a jubilant daybreak to end the long night of extraneous dominance of our spiritual lives. Today, we must face the truth that the freedom Jesus won for us, though total, has been compromised. The application of the opening line of the social contract of Jean Jacques Rousseau that says, 'man is born free and everywhere he is in chains', buttresses the point. More than two thousand years later, the activities of the world is still sadly, enmeshed in the claws of segregation and discrimination amongst different world religions.

The beauty of our unity, faith and hope, do not lay in those deficiencies, however awful the occurrences of our individual and collective shortcomings may be. Each one of us is challenged to offer his or her positive quota in the fight against the pandemic of sin. The will to find a true success commences with the individual. The will to win, the unquestionable understanding that though we differ as individuals, there is no substitute for a peaceful cosmos; that if you fail in this regard, the world will undergo pain as we at this time do; that the very preoccupation of our communal conviction must be unity and faith.

We should not direct our unity only to fighting an existential visible enemy like the coronavirus, we should double also our effort in fighting the perennial presence of sin which tears humanity apart more than the former.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid, pp. 105-111; J. KOMONCHAK, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, p. 1065.

## **The Need for a New Humanity**

Our write up refers to new humanity as the definitive goal. The concept of new humanity surfaces because our discussion uncovers the discordancy between the social, religious and personal values of the existing way of life and the way that we suggest through unity and faith.

The old humanity that has a sullied value exploits the weak and powerless, and pursues respect and honour. Their negative and egoistic actions compromise life and ignores service and sacrifice that liberates and saves life.

The image of new humanity is expounded against the damaging disordered patterns in the existing structure and value system that believe in a depraved order. Our work puts down a strategy for humanity, painting in broad strokes a visualization for how people should comport themselves against sin. The first fruit and model of new humanity is that every individual must make serious effort to liberate his or herself from the clutches and powers of sin, and create a new humanity by giving up terrible habits. Each one of us is challenged to portray the character of new humanity by reversing the culture of domination and possession by sin, and swapping it with unity and faith that contemplates others as more important.

New humanity is a way to neutralize the shattering effects of sin upon human relationships. It aims at the transformation of such structures depraved by our selfish way of living and greed, leading to dominance and revolt, and takes renewed approach to human relationships. Our collective unity and faith for humanity reveals the basis of the transformation and this new humanity as a result, functions on the principles of service and self-giving. There has to be a new understanding of anthropology. Man has to re-define his objective, purpose and goal in the world. There is need for humanity to scrutinize the connection between itself and God, the bond amongst peoples and nations, and the connection with the environment. All these dimensions are important for a holistic life.

## **Conclusion**

We are creatures of habit and old habits may die hard. However, once dead, they are hard to revive too. Difficult though it may be, there are multiple questions to be answered if or when the pandemic is over and a vaccine is eventually discovered. Will life remain the same? Can we sustain our collective unity in the fight against coronavirus and use it as a tool to combat sin and restore practicable and upright morality? Alternatively, shall we return to the 'status quo ante', that is, the old way?

The church incessantly makes every effort to affect her children with a sense of the dreadfulness of sin that they may fear it and shun it. We are fallen living beings, and our spiritual life on earth is a struggle. Sin is our adversary, and while of our individual strength, we cannot evade sin, with God's grace we can. If we but place no hindrance to the workings of grace, we can circumvent all deliberate sin. If we have the calamity to sin, and strive for God's grace and forgiveness, He will not keep us at bay. Sin has its therapy in grace, which is given us by God, and grace can only be obtained when one has faith and is united in love in the one who dispenses it. Where sin is regarded as an indispensable and inevitable circumstance of things human, where helplessness to circumvent sin is thought of as indispensable, deterrence naturally follows. The doctrine of the creation of man in a superior state and his fall by a deliberate disobedience, destroys not only the sense of balance of the human faculties but also leaves man susceptible to evil. Left to ourselves we fall, but by keeping close to God in unity and faith and constantly seeking His help, we can stand and struggle against sin.

Our society only works when we think not just of ourselves but also of each other. It has also pulled the curtain back on another hard truth, something that we all have to eventually accept when this COVID-19 pandemic is over. If the world is going to get better, if we must minimize the pandemic of sin, it is up to us. That realization may be somewhat intimidating, but I am optimistic it is also inspiring. With all the challenges our world is facing right now, nobody can tell us: no, you are too young to understand or this is how it has always been done. Because with

so much uncertainty, with everything suddenly up for grabs, this is our generation's world to shape.

We should not be afraid of the pandemic of sin or COVID-19 because the world has gone through tough times before: famine, disease and unbridled sexual promiscuity. Each time in all of this, we came out stronger because, a new generation learned from past mistakes and figured out how to make things better. We should learn to do what is morally right, what feels morally good, what is convenient and what is easy. We should decide and learn to ground ourselves in values that last. We will not get it right every time, we will make mistakes like we all do. However, if we listen to the truth that is inside ourselves, even when it is hard, even when it is inconvenient, people will notice, they will gravitate towards us and we will be part of the solution instead of the problem.

Just like the coronavirus, the pandemic of sin has shaken up the foundation of the status quo. This should not cause us to panic because despite what we hear or see on social media, we are waves from the same sea. There is good news because like every tragedy, we can let this destroy us or we can use it to our benefit and repair relationships with our sisters and brothers. Wipe away silly grudges because when all is said and done, all we ever really had in this world was each other.

So, let us flatten the curve of sin and expand our hearts. Let us social distance from sin, boost our immune systems and be mindful of not only where we put our hands but also where we put our attention. We should be alert, not fearful because sin is a pandemic easily transmitted. If you do contract it or exhibit symptoms, we recommend that you change your way of life, decontaminate yourself by imbibing positive values.

Let us learn to unite in this battle because no one does big things by themselves. Right now when people are scared, it is easy to be cynical and say let me just look out for myself, or my family, or people who look or think or pray like me. But if we are going to get through these difficult times, if we are going to create a world where everybody has an opportunity to eliminate sin, if we are going to save the world from sin and defeat future

pandemics, then we have to do it together. Let us be alive to the struggles of each other, leave behind all the old terrible habits that divide us and set the world on a different path.

We need to be conscious of this moment. Our collective memories would give us control over how we can respond to our common experience and empower ourselves for the future. These collective memories are particularly important this time because they provide the foundation for a critical examination of the past, present and future. Let us use this challenging moment to wake up to what is important. Fighting this malaise together is the only way we can rise above the pandemic of sin. The only vaccine for sin is communal unity and faith.

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