

ATTITUDINAL CHANGES AS THE ANTIDOTE TO LIVING WITH COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA

BY

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Abstract

A score of persons across the globe has opined that year 2020 should be considered not existent because of the abnormality it exudes that adversely affects every facet of life. Even though the virus of Covid 19 may not leave us as quickly we can imagine, change of attitudes from our end will help to nip it at board in no distant time. This must have its coverage from reviewing not only our mode of worship, socializing, idiosyncrasies, and upholding of our different cultural values that define us as persons but also to make us responsible for our actions. Thus, the existing realities must be assessed as they really are and not as they seem to some selected few while our response need to aim at building, restructuring, salvaging, constructing and making rather than shifting blame or destroying. Joharis Window throws more light into this whereby an individual will be helped by others to come to knowledge and realization of the facts about self and life. A situation in which both the blind and subconscious areas of the Window will blend and a new world and better persons emerge.

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens....”

The number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 have soared on daily basis globally with hundreds of thousands casualties recorded. This deadly disease turned pandemic was first diagnosed at Wuhan in China late 2019 and has swung many medical experts into actions to see to its curtailment. Several measures have also being imposed by the government to contain it but the harder

¹Ecclesiastes 3:1

the measures the more it spreads. Up till date, all efforts for its cure are on trials and errors which make the solution to be rather remote from us. What seems to be a short time battle to control has become a marathon or a long time response. World Health Organization (W.H.O) referred to this virus at initial stage simply as disease, then as epidemic and later as pandemic considering its swift spreading like wild-fire that comes along with the high rate of fatality. W.H.O.'s president held that this pandemic will be with us for a long while. Others say that if the disease subsides at all for a while, it can at any moment rear its ugly head. Without mincing words, the rippling effects of this perilous time are better imagined than experienced. Nevertheless, living with this new virus calls for attitudinal changes in every ramification of our existence:

1. Attitude / Mode of Worship: Human beings are socio-religious animals, even at the very act of denying the existence or presence of God, facts are staring us at face of His indubitably Supremacy over all that exists. Many people are lamenting especially the older folks that the time has come for the extermination of religion whereby the civil authority has to rule on the religious leaders' authorities. The compliance of Vatican City to the government's orders of total lockdown in which other nations follow suit, not only of Christendom but other religious professions, is highly a thing of concern for many with several questions perturbing their minds. The fact remains that the church stands for salvation of souls "Salus animarum" and nothing can displace her stance. She is to lead, to teach and to sanctify – but in the face of trepidation of highly contagious corona virus, every measure that can put it into a halt would not be compromised.

Faith and reason are two sides of a coin; religion is a thing of the heart just as rationalization is a thing of the mind. Jesus retorted the man who brought his mute and deaf' son for healing when he said that "“if you can!’ everything is possible to one who has faith”. Then the father cried out, “I do believe, help

my unbelief!”². In other words, we cannot remove the triad form in the mode of true and authentic worship, namely: the vocation, the incarnation and the communion. The first is that which God calls us to be according to our capacity, the second is our acceptance and readiness to internalize what we believe, and the latter is the consummation of our “Yes” to God. The triad serves as true rungs of a ladder for smooth or rough Christians’ journey, as the case may be, towards a union with God. Saint Theresa of Avila’s *The Interior Castle* may give better explanation on this.

In her *The Interior Castle*, St. Theresa of Avila identifies seven dwelling places in relating her experience of ardent faith that leads to perfect union with Christ. According to her, the first three dwelling places are classified external and without any activity of the soul. It is the time to fan into flame one’s faith while the soul undergoes purification through a life of prayer and self-giving. The fourth dwelling place reveals the illumination phase that precedes the self-knowing. It serves as intermediary state of the conflict with the self-will to accept or to reject God’s love. The last three dwelling places are found inwardly where soul is passive with total submission to God’s will. It is the phase that permits the self-knowledge of God in communion with Him in love³. As a corollary, the four characteristic elements of the first set of believers as specified by the Acts of the Apostles add credence to this:

- All the members follow faithfully the teachings of the apostles
- They have all their goods in common
- They meet together for celebration of the Eucharist (called “breaking of bread”)
- They meet to pray together⁴.

²Mark 9:23-24.

³Kavanaugh, Kieran; Rodriguez, Otilio. (2012) (Transl.). *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications. Pp. 263-452.

⁴Acts of the Apostles 2:42.

The restriction of movements or lockdown may prevent people of movements at will or to gather at different places of worship, it does not prevent anyone from worshiping his/her God in the heart. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth”⁵. The human family remains a domestic church where faith, moral, virtues and civility are being taught. Charity begins at home but does not end there. If restrictions prevent anyone from worshiping God, there will be little or no difference when there is freedom. The head of the family must not shy away from his responsibility as the father and priest of his family to herald the teachings of Christ deposited to us by the Apostles of which the Church stands through her character. He must keep his family together by praying and eating together in loving-charity and good-will without failing because:

The Christian family is the first place of education in prayer. Based on the sacrament of marriage, the family is the “domestic church” where God’s children learn to pray “as the Church”, and to persevere in prayer. For young children in particular, daily family prayer is the first witness of the Church’s living memory as awakened patiently by the Holy Spirit.⁶

We must realize that the mode of worship will not remain the same of what we are used to after this pandemic. It will rather take another look of the same contents while the value of faith will have to be all encompassing in its profession and propagation to the next generation. Mindful of the fact that, the Church is not necessarily the concrete structures we see and touch but structures of ourselves and of our beings that exhibit the aura of authentic faith to the outside world.

2. *Socio-Cultural Attitude*: Nature and nurture form a man and each person is a product of his/her society as well as of the age

⁵John 4:24.

⁶Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2685.

he/she lives. Man lives simultaneously in two different worlds: the world of values and the world of actuality. The world of value says: absolute, spirit, transcendence, immortality. The world of actuality says: relative, want, material, necessity. The reality of a person is open to the Absolute, but limited by the relative and then becomes a paradox: other-centered and at the same time self-centered. The psychological integration of three levels of human mind of Sigmund Freud comes to play – id, *ego*, and *superego*. Id is a part of the unconscious mind where many of a person's basic needs, feelings and desires are supposed to exist. Ego is the part of the mind that responsible for the sense of who one is with its constituting components of the actual self and the ideal self and that of its contents of needs-attitudes-values. Superego is the part of the mind that makes one aware of right and wrong and makes one feels guilty if any wrong is done. Nevertheless, let us emphasize on Johari Window. Johari Window was developed by American psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in the 1950's, calling it 'Johari' after combining their first names, Joe and Harry. The four rectangles represent the four areas of the self:

- A. That which is known to the self and others: public area (conscious)*
- B. That which is unknown to the self, but known to others: blind area (unconscious)*
- C. That which is known to the self, but unknown to others: secret area (preconscious)*
- D. That which is unknown to the self as well as to others: subconscious* area, specially the unconscious and the profoundly preconscious.

⁷Cencini, A. and Manenti, A. (1982). Psychology and Formation. Transl. by Plathara, Anne; Mattappallil, Anne fsp. Bologna: Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, pp.63-64.

* Conscious: expresses the normal area of awareness that one has of oneself or of things as they are present, all that is immediately present or accessible to awareness; Subconscious: comprises all that area of psychic experience which is not present to the actual consciousness of the individual and cannot be evoked at leisure rather it is all that is not known; Preconscious: comprises those psychic contents not immediately present to our consciousness, but which could be brought to awareness through ordinary means – reflection, introspection, examination of conscience, meditation etc.; Unconscious: comprises those psychic contents which can be brought back into our awareness only through professional means e.g. certain psychotherapeutic techniques.

If the projection of W.H.O that epi-centre of Covid 19 might be shifted to Africa in no distant time is true as a result of the slow but geometrical progression in number of the pandemic she is experiencing, we can't but to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers to reduce and curtail the spread. The following may not be out of place:

- Daily hygiene on food, utensils, regular hands and feet nails' cutting, constant hygienic washing with soap and water or the use of sanitizer while maintaining social distancing.
- Emphasis on "Operation do it yourself" – Cook your food, bake your cake, toast your bread, grow your crops and tend your animals etc. with little or no dependence on others.
- Ability to study and understand one's body chemistry and to attend to any infirmity as soon as it is noticed.
- Observing of table etiquettes and developing of a good eating habit.
- Making face-mask's wearing part of our dressing code until pandemic is relatively over.
- Fidelity to the state of life one has chosen: be it celibate or married.
- Review on some of our cultural attitudes and practices that are abhorrent or serve as obstacles to the spirit of time.
- Having courage by not allowing fear to rule our lives. Bearing in mind that courage is not about having the strength to go on about certain things but going on when one doesn't have the strength to do so.

3. *Response / Reactionary Attitude*: William Shakespeare more eloquently in Hamlet said "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". Psychologist Albert Ellis has expressed the same sentiment: "You largely feel the way you think". This is based on the assumption that "people are not disturbed by things but rather by their view of things". He came to term with this in his theory 'rational-emotive therapy'⁸. Rational-emotive therapy

⁸Albert Ellis and Rational-Emotive Therapy in Hockenbury & Hockenbury. (2013). Psychology (Sixth Edition), New York: Worth Publishers. p. 621.

(RET) of Ellis focuses on changing the patterns of irrational thinking that are believed to be the primary cause of the client's emotional distress and psychological problems. Thus, our responses or reactions to certain stimuli depend majorly on whom we are and the amount of formation we appropriated and internalized. There are no two identical situations in life. The ability to cope with what the situation at hand demands, speaks volume of the level of maturity attained by an individual spiritually, socially, psychologically, and intellectually. Although psycho-physiological, psycho-social and rational-spiritual form three levels of our psychic life, to strike an "equilibrium is a fundamental necessity arising from the simultaneous presence of these three levels in our behaviour. In itself, it is something that really happens as a human being is a physical-relational-rational unity who expresses his/her essential composite nature in every action"⁹.

There is no doubt that the atmosphere in which Covid 19 pandemic operates is quite tense and queer which can make one easily fall away into reactionary when a response is needed. The fact is that times will pass away but human beings remain the same. The capacity to come to term with reality rather than chasing shadow goes a long way in building a good and integral personality of one-self. Less energy will be exerted, more understanding will be reached and serene with peaceful atmosphere will emerge to see a renewed world after Covid 19 pandemic gives way. We should stop creating the situations that would eventually boomerang to taunt us. There is power in positive thinking. If you think positively the result will be positive while negative thinking brings about negative result. We can never substitute dialogue as a surest way to justice, peace and development, even as we battle with Covid 19 pandemic, bearing in mind that if a man's education is finished, he is finished. Thereafter, new song will re-echo: "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give glory because of your faithfulness and love"¹⁰; having grown an immunity to cope with the virus.

⁹Cencini, A.; Manenti, A. (1982). Psychology and Formation. Pp. 19-32

¹⁰Psalms 115:1.