

What does Covid-19 have to do with God?



Werner Gitt

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Never before has a disease brought the whole world to its knees in the unprecedented way it did in the northern spring of 2020. The new coronavirus 'Covid-19' brought public life to a global standstill with astonishing speed. Worldwide, shutdowns were ordered, events cancelled, universities, schools and childcare centres were closed. Football games were cancelled or took place before empty stands. Worship services were forbidden—something which did not even happen in wartime.

A highly mobile society, with all the world's continents connected by 130,000 aircraft carrying 12 million passengers every day, suddenly found itself in standby mode. This was such a major rupture that it involved everyone around the world. The force with which all this suddenly impacted mankind was such that it even eclipsed the climate debate.

We were surprised in the context of our normality—right in the midst of our carefree everyday life.

We had booked trips and planned family festivities; everything had to be cancelled at the shortest of notice. This included major events such as the Olympics in Tokyo, the Boston Marathon, and the Munich Oktoberfest. What we took for granted until now was all at once suspended. Suddenly, there was no longer life in the usual way—no football, no concerts, no theatre, no lectures,





no worship services. In a nutshell, only the words ‘cancelled’ or ‘closed’ were left.

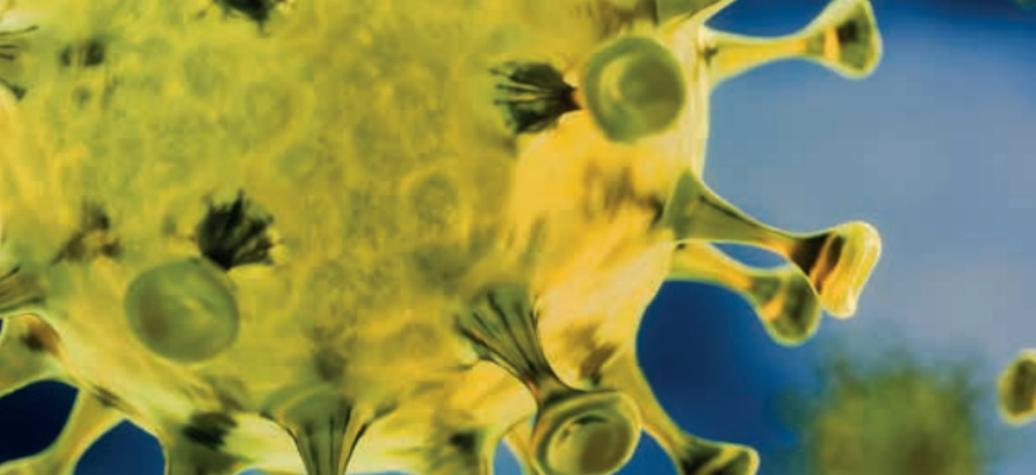
The measures prescribed to protect people from the coronavirus cleared the streets, and emptied public spaces normally overflowing with tourists. Crippled, the world’s once-flourishing economic and social life was mostly relocated to behind closed doors or onto the Internet.

Never before in the modern history of most countries did people have their fundamentally guaranteed rights to liberty, once seen as basic and immutable, progressively restricted—albeit as health precautions.

In a TV program about the crisis on April 14 2020, microbiologist *Lothar H. Wieler*, president of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin, revealed the extent of the helplessness: “This pandemic has never existed before. We don’t have a blueprint to act on. The disease is new.”

The coronavirus measures also caused an unexpected economic and financial crisis in all countries, the extent of which cannot yet be estimated.

IMF chief economist *Gita Gopinath* said: “The magnitude and speed of collapse ... is unlike anything experienced in our lifetimes.” On April 16, 2020 a headline in the *Washington Post* read: “The US has thrown more than \$6 trillion at the coronavirus crisis. That number could grow.” In Germany, the largest aid package in its history was mobilised. Add to that guarantees by federal and state governments and in late April 2020, the German federal budget burden was around 1.2 trillion euros (over 1.3 trillion US dollars, three times the normal



annual US government expenditure). The ensuing debts worldwide are estimated to take generations to repay, if ever.

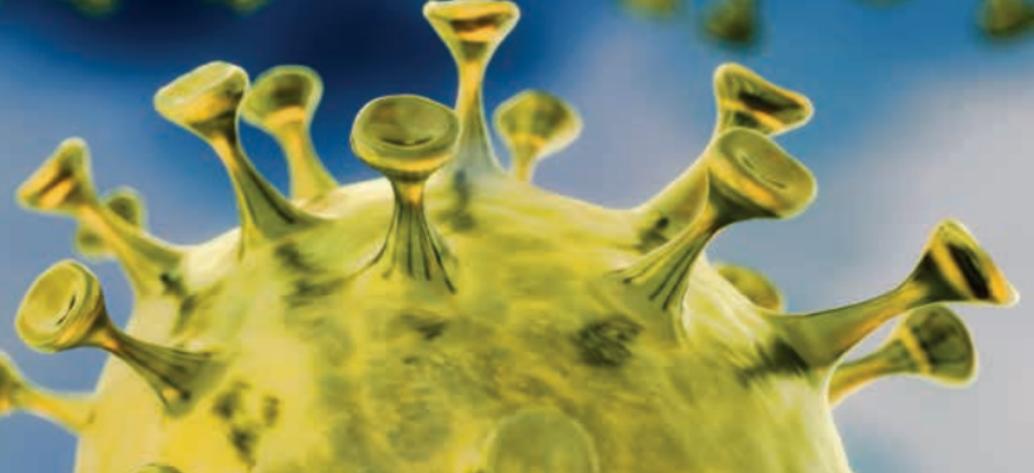
We search for an explanation for this pandemic. Who will give it to us?

The churches have given us no answers

The historian Prof. *Michael Wolffsohn*, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of April 20, 2020, bemoaned the silence of the church: "I for one have not come across any in-depth theological interpretation of this pandemic from leading clergymen."

The *Welt am Sonntag* (World on Sunday) headline: "Will the coronavirus crisis become a declaration of bankruptcy for the churches?" The article states: "The self-restraint of the churches seems strange at a time when guidance is more in demand than ever. In the peace movement, in the retrofitting debate [housing energy efficiency], in the resistance to nuclear power, in the struggle for solidarity with the Third World and against Hartz IV [unemployment benefit reforms] in Germany, the Christian churches were ... always at the forefront. For years, the former bishop and chairwoman of the council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, *Margot Käßmann*, could be expected to comment or even lecture on almost any subject. Often also without being asked. Now she is taciturn." (Quoted in *ideaSpektrum*, 16.2020, p. 11.)

So we turn to the Bible—or put differently, what does God tell us about all of this in His Word?



1. We live in a fallen world

We live in a world where our life has a 100 percent mortality rate. Everything here is transient and impermanent. About 20 million different poisons are known in this creation. Snake venoms have such a highly complex chemistry that even the best chemists were long unable to synthesise these chemical compounds. Whoever wants to interpret this world with all its bad things, yet ignores the Fall from the beginning of human history, will inevitably end up with misinterpretations.

All human attempts to build an earthly paradise here have always failed. The reason for this is sin with its law: ***“The wages of sin is death”*** (The Bible, Romans 6:23). That is why there are so many wars, so much hatred, so many diseases, and death in this world. In these Covid-19 times we have become aware of this anew.

2. According to the majority opinion, God has nothing to do with Covid-19

In our time it has become common to only preach one-sidedly about the love of God; the judgements of God are largely ignored. The Bible, on the other hand, shows us that the Deluge with its millions of deaths was caused by God, as was the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the scattering of the people of Israel all over the world.

Can one push God aside in the Covid crisis as easily as so many politicians and church leaders do? The Catholic Bishop of Magdeburg *Gerhard Feige*, with his contribution in *Christ und Welt* (Christ and World) No. 17 of April 16, 2020, is represent-

ative of such a way of thinking. He quotes “the most recent common word of the Catholic, Evangelical and Orthodox Church in Germany”, in which it was said: “Sickness is not God’s punishment—neither for individuals nor for entire societies, nations and continents or even for all of humanity. Diseases are part of our human nature as vulnerable and fragile beings.”

So, in a worldwide event like this Covid-19 pandemic, we are meant to ignore the God who even counts the hairs on our heads (Matthew 10:30), and who gives each of the 10^{25} stars its own name (Psalm 147:4)? Or have we already declared God dead (*Nietzsche*)?

Nothing is more urgent than heeding the statements of the Bible, because only from there will we be able to appropriately assess the situation.

When it comes to drought and floods, have we considered what is written in Job 12:15? *“If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.”*

3. The forgotten God

In light of our topic, consider just the fact that in Germany alone, in 2019 there were 100,000 abortions, and more than triple that number in the US. According to the Bible, this is murder. We have unilaterally and comprehensively replaced



the biblical truth of the creation account with a scientifically unsustainable story of microbes-to-man evolution. Are we aware of what we have thereby done?

By rejecting or nullifying His Word—
the Bible—we accuse God of lying.

The climate debate has taken on the features of a substitute religion. With state-sanctioned same-sex marriage sweeping the world, we have disregarded God's command. At the same time as it increasingly rejects Christianity, the West is deliberately embracing Islam. This religion not only categorically rejects the Cross, the Koran describes unbelievers—from an Islamic viewpoint that includes Christians, Jews and atheists—as the vilest of creatures (Surah 98:6).

The list of misconduct could be extended at will. We act as if God did not even exist. Or have we constructed for ourselves a make-believe god—as the post-war poet *Wolfgang Borchert* put it—who is not responsible for anything anymore?

Most nations have become godless. What if we were to take an opinion poll of passers-by in a busy square of a major European city and ask: "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Lord, and have you consciously turned to Him in a personal decision?" How many would answer with a clear YES? The result would very definitely come in well below the 5 percent level.

Should God be silent on all of this? Galatians 6:7 says: "***Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.***"

4. Covid-19 has a lot to do with God!

In view of what was said under point 3, we now consider what God revealed to King Solomon: "***When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.***" (2 Chronicles 7:13–14).

Here God lets us know that He is and remains the One acting in everything. He is the one who holds back the rain, brings a plague of locusts across the land, permits extensive forest fires and tsunamis and sends a plague (e.g. Ebola, coronavirus). **So Covid-19 does have something to do with God!**

We may try to explain all such things scientifically, or as human failure; or even to attribute them to chance. We would be just as wrong as if someone wanted to explain away the three-and-a-half year absence of rain in Elijah's time (James 5:17–18).

The prophet Amos (3:6) says quite dramatically: *"Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"* Similarly in Isaiah 45:7: *"I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things."* We are astonished that God presents Himself as the cause of accidents, calamities, epidemics etc. At first glance, this statement horrifies us. But God does not merely permit misfortune—He is sovereign over all things. That doesn't really fit well into our trivialising idea of a God who is only loving.

5. How does God speak to us today?

God does nothing arbitrarily—He is not capricious. Everything He does has a reason and is justified, and He often announces His judgements long enough in advance to give us the opportunity to repent: *"For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets"* (Amos 3,7). This is what God did, e.g., before the Deluge (Genesis 6:7) or before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18).

In Hebrews 1:1–2 we read: *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son [Jesus Christ]."* Even today, God speaks to us personally, namely through His Son, Jesus Christ.

To understand the coronavirus crisis, we look to Jesus, of whom Luke 24:45 says: *"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."* So we are directed to the Bible, which unlocks Jesus for us through the Holy Spirit. Holding to this biblical alignment can prevent us from falling for the many self-proclaimed but false prophets.



So after all the above considerations, we are justified in asking the question, did this Covid-19 pandemic come upon this world by accident, or was it sent by God? Excluding God would definitely be the wrong answer. Here in this world we come face to face with His actions, without necessarily being able to unambiguously unravel their significance. However, three answers seem possible to me:

- The pandemic is a judgement upon a world that has become largely godless.
- It is God's call to repentance so that we can be saved in Jesus.
- It is a sign of the sooncoming return of Jesus. He predicted that 'birth pains' would precede His coming (Matthew 24:8).

6. What is God's message to us?

What do we learn from this coronavirus crisis? The first thing we recognise is our helplessness. Despite all our technical achievements, we have to acknowledge and accept our limitations. We can see that this event has affected the whole world. No nation or group of people has been exempt—one way or another, it has affected Christians and atheists, Muslims and Hindus, young and old, the poor and the rich. It has affected the healthy and those already infirm—in short, everyone!

When God speaks to us so universally, the question arises: Is there a message that also applies to every person on Earth? The Bible gives us a very clear and unmistakeable answer, in passages such as:

- “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2: 4).
- “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).

In his tract ‘Fear of the Virus?’, *Manfred Röseler* compares the Covid-19 virus with a much more insidious virus—namely sin. This virus brings us not only bodily death, but eternal death (Hell). We are warned in advance of this catastrophe (Revelation 21: 8) so that it should not come as a surprise to anyone.

Because God is love personified (1 John 4:16), He wants to heal us—whoever we are. With Jesus’ death and resurrection, medicine against the virus of sin is available. Now the short, saving message is: **“Whoever believes in the Son [of God] has eternal life”** (John 3:36). Confess to God’s Son Jesus the shortcomings of your life—especially your way of life without Him—and ask Him to enter your life. Then you will have been healed and will have won Heaven. How you can do this in practice is explained in detail here: wernergitt.de/turning

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