

Is the Coronavirus a Message from God?

As reported May 16 in the H-T, some 62% of Americans recently polled by the Chicago Divinity School and the Center for Public Affairs Research believe “strongly” or “somewhat” that the coronavirus is a sign that God is telling humanity to change.

What about that? Seriously. It may be foolhardy to take on such a question, but please hear me out.

I don't believe illnesses, diseases, and other disasters happen because God is out to punish somebody or send people a message. When your tire blows out and you crash your car, when lightning strikes your home or it gets washed away by flood, or when you get cancer, God is not out to get you. God is not even sending you a message. Although you might decide you need to get new tires, or re-build your home in a safer location, or change your diet or stop smoking or use sun block to improve your life prospects.

The idea that God is a meddling scorekeeper who doles out punishments and/or rewards based on how we're doing needs to be put to rest. God is not like that obtrusive Santa Claus “who knows when you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake.”

On the other hand: If this world is a creation of God, and if God is somehow in some way a living presence, spirit, or force in the world, then there is something intuitively compelling in the idea that phenomena and events that are harmful, destructive, and life-diminishing might be some sort of sign that we need to change our ways. And – for those who do not believe in God – perhaps the idea of Mother Nature or the Universe or Gaia or Karma or “the Force” sending us a message might make similar sense.

What I do know is that we do need to change in some major ways if we are to continue to flourish on this planet. There is an ecology on this biosphere that we have violated time and again, and that we continue to disregard, and now some of those violations are coming back to haunt and trouble us. If we do not pay attention, and learn better how to coexist with each other and with the rest of life on this blue-green habitation, we will not long survive.

None of this means that everything happens for a reason. There are reasons why things happen. That hardly means they were meant to happen. If you stumble and abrade your knee, that's why your knee is skinned. It doesn't mean it was meant to be skinned! Lots of stuff is senseless or accidental so far as human destiny is concerned. God does not will everything that happens. Far from it. We're quite capable of messing things up on our own.

Nonetheless, everything has the potential to serve as a lesson, to alter our perceptions, to guide our thinking, to teach us better how to live. It depends on what we make of whatever happens to us, and that depends on how well we are able to see and relate whatever happens to us to everything else that is going on. For religious believers, it also depends on how open we are to the Spirit “in whom we live and move and have our being.”

We need to think holistically, we need to think ecologically, we need to apprehend the relationships that connect us to all other beings and events.

Meanwhile, wear a mask when out in public, if not so much to protect yourself then out of consideration and kindness to others.

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