

An Admonition

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation!” Jesus says this to his disciples in the hours before his conviction. We also must watch: When our normal daily routines fall away or are taken from us – such as in the Corona-crisis – we quickly begin to teeter. When lies are camouflaged in a thin veneer of truth we must be all the more vigilant in order to distinguish between spirits and identify the truth. Prayer helps!

Marcel Rebiai. April 2020

The year 2020 began with a bang, signalling a year of agitation and change in our life circumstances, such as have been hereto unknown. A virus, the origin and spread of which no-one seems to be able to or want to give account of, has cast a pall of fear on literally the entire world and brought every aspect of life to a screeching halt. The streets of cities are empty, economies crashed and many, many people became unemployed and poor. Social events such as sports, culture, education and entertainment were suspended without question. Family gatherings were made impossible, grandchildren separated from their grandparents, and religious gatherings such as church-services were discontinued. The reverberations reached everyone, without exception.

A punishment from God?

Hovering over everything is the question: Who caused this pandemic, and what does it mean for mankind? Is it the fruit of a humanity that plays god with nature and irresponsibly instrumentalizes the forces of nature for its own purposes – and now, as in the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice, the spirits that were called have slipped our control? It's possible that this is the case – God did say: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.” (Galatians 6:7). In this case the pandemic would be the harvest of an evil crop. Or is it punishment for the presumption of a humanity that has turned its back on God, has made him a laughing-stock, and has become its own god? The bible tells us that God doesn't wish actively for the death of the godless: “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23)

A fruit of presumption...

When judgement comes on mankind, this is a fruit of mankind's actions. Jesus expressly tells us: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17). Judgement is a reality – not as a punishment from God, but as a fruit and consequence of the hearts and actions of mankind. God hates everything evil, cruel, and life-destroying. He hates pride, presumption, and unmercifulness. He hates lies and deceit. Even when mankind doesn't want to believe in His existence and makes its own human wisdom and knowledge the standard by which it explains and forms life, this doesn't change the fact that God is and remains creator and fount of life.

“The wickedness of the human race is great”

The bible tells us that we all have gone astray like sheep, each going his own way. Our own ways have led us to where “darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples” (Isaiah 60:2). Humanity has sunk into darkness. The wilful ways of man end in God admitting, His grief palpable: “how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” The power-brokers of the earth have spent the last decades working to ban God from the public eye, and to make laws after their own hearts. Christian thought, which has been the foundation of western culture, has lost much significance, and continues to lose it. A few examples thereof: The covenant of marriage was dismantled and every form of sexuality not only legalized but even supported and propagated; murder of children in their mothers' wombs and suicide as basic rights of man were anchored firmly in law, citing absolute self-determination. Just like the Psalmist writes in Psalm 2: “The kings of the

earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed.” The godlessness of mankind paves the way for evil just as in the times of Noah, and threatens to lead man and creation into destruction. Jesus is our ark! He is the final word that God spoke to men.

Man without God

In the period of grace, God patiently shelters mankind from the consequences of his destructive wickedness and gave them plenty of time to turn to Him and be saved. But when God begins to remove His aegis, the power of evil breaks out without hindrance in and through humanity. God allows mankind to experience how utterly hopelessly at the mercy of these destructive forces – in the hopes that they will turn to Him and ask Him for help and salvation.

Slaves of evil?

There are only two possible decisions for us to make, regardless whether we believe and accept it or not: Either we become free children of God through Christ's salvation, or we can turn our backs on God and become slaves of evil, sharing his fate in judgement. And so, recently, God once again shook the earth and placed us in a time of decision: Repent, turn back to the living God, or continue to deny Him.

Evil creates fear and chaos

When evil breaks out, it always begins to create chaos, confusion, pain, and destruction in order to shore up its might – which lies in fear. Fear of the virus has spread faster and more effectively than the virus itself! What would have seemed impossible yesterday is reality today. The unshakeable has been brushed aside in a moment. In their fear of sickness and death people of all cultures, religions, races, and traditions have simply ceded their religious, private, familial, and social rights to the authorities – if only these would save them from the epidemic.

Fear enslaves

The most valuable asset of man without God is his wholeness. And so he will throw himself at the feet of whatever power promises to guarantee immanent health, safety, and well-being. Once fear for one's own survival becomes great enough, everything that is held dear and considered sacred is dropped and betrayed, up to and including friends and family. Jesus told us this would happen: “You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me.” (Luke 21:16-17). He also continues saying: “Stand firm, and you will win life.” (verse 19). Our life – that is, eternal life with the Father.

The Evil One's intention

Some of you may think that these words have been extreme and fanatical. But God's word is quite clear and unambiguous. This worldwide panic bears the signature of the Evil One. He uses our hubris, pride, and overconfidence as a channel in order to spread a godless rule over mankind, bringing lies and fear and destruction. When Jesus returns, He will bring the reign of the Evil One to an end. Until then, let us, as Jesus' disciples, witness to the world of the saving grace of God, and save as many as allow themselves to be saved.

Shock shows what things are made of

In the coming time we will experience an increasing polarization and separation of light and darkness, lies and truth, righteousness and falsehood, faith and godlessness. This will also happen within the Church and Christendom: A separation of the wheat and chaff. This judgement, breaking in over us, is an examination and exposure of the motives and attitudes of our hearts – both of those who believe in Jesus as their saviour, and those that do not. We, the Church of Christ, are being shaken, so that only the unshakeable will remain.

The new world order

Many of the regulations that were issued during the crisis will remain effective afterwards. The world has been ordered anew – so we are told also by the powers that be. Believers will be forced to choose between submitting to this new world order, based entirely on humanity and for a system without the God of the bible, or staying faithful to Jesus and to God's order, possibly paying an exacting price in persecution. Remember that we may be in the world, but are not to be OF it! We do not belong to this world. This will become increasingly obvious. Men and women of faith will fall outside of the norm in an increasing fashion, will become outsiders. They will be seen as a stumbling block, a moralizing, anti-freedom community, narrow-mindedly and fanatically opposing the great unity and brotherliness of humanity that this crisis is leaving in its wake. Enmity and hate against the name of Jesus will show itself more and more unmasked and all who profess the name of Jesus will be seen as enemies and haters of humanity. But Jesus bears witness to himself as the only way, life and truth; there is no other way to salvation, peace and redemption except through him and in him.

God wants to save us!

What does the coming age mean for us? God loves mankind to the end, and so this time is a time to testify to the kingdom of God. Through us, God calls mankind to be reconciled with Him. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that all who believe in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). Jesus came to seek out the lost and to save those who let themselves be saved. The real battle is a battle for the immortal souls of men. God does not want us to remain under the power of the Evil One and share in his fate of damnation. God *wants* to save us, but He will not force His help on anyone. The more the dark night of godlessness spreads across the world, the clearer and louder our testimony must be so that people who yearn after truth and salvation hear our message, see our light, and can find the path to life.

Overcoming the Evil One

God has given us clear instructions on how to overcome evil and be steadfast in our own lives. “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” (Revelation 12:11). We overcome by the proclamation of the redeeming blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, God's son, who alone is Lord over life and death. We will not allow ourselves to be corrupted and silenced by fear. Even if this means – in the eyes of the world – becoming enemies of human freedom and breakers of the new law. Should it be necessary, out of love for Jesus, we will lay down our lives, knowing that our inheritance and future are eternal life with the Father.

Advice in times of tribulation

Seek God's face even more decisively than usual. Look to Him, not to the pandemic, the panic, the scaremongering. That to which we look is reflected in our hearts and souls!

Honour, praise, and thank God for His grace, protection, and presence – instead of constantly thinking about this catastrophe, or even worse: Constantly *talking* about it. Psalms and worship songs are our loyal companions!

Actively build up your trust in God: Read in His word often, study it, memorize it – “eat” it and make it your daily bread, be it as a small portion in the morning and/or over the whole day.

Fear is not in love. Our fellow man needs this love and faith now more than ever. This is what we want to bring to them, be it as an encouragement, a greeting, in a caring and friendly fashion.

Jesus is always with us, surrounding us. When we gather together in His name, we experience His presence additionally in communion with our brothers and sisters in faith. He has promised us: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matthew 18:20). In the household at least this can be lived out more than most times.